

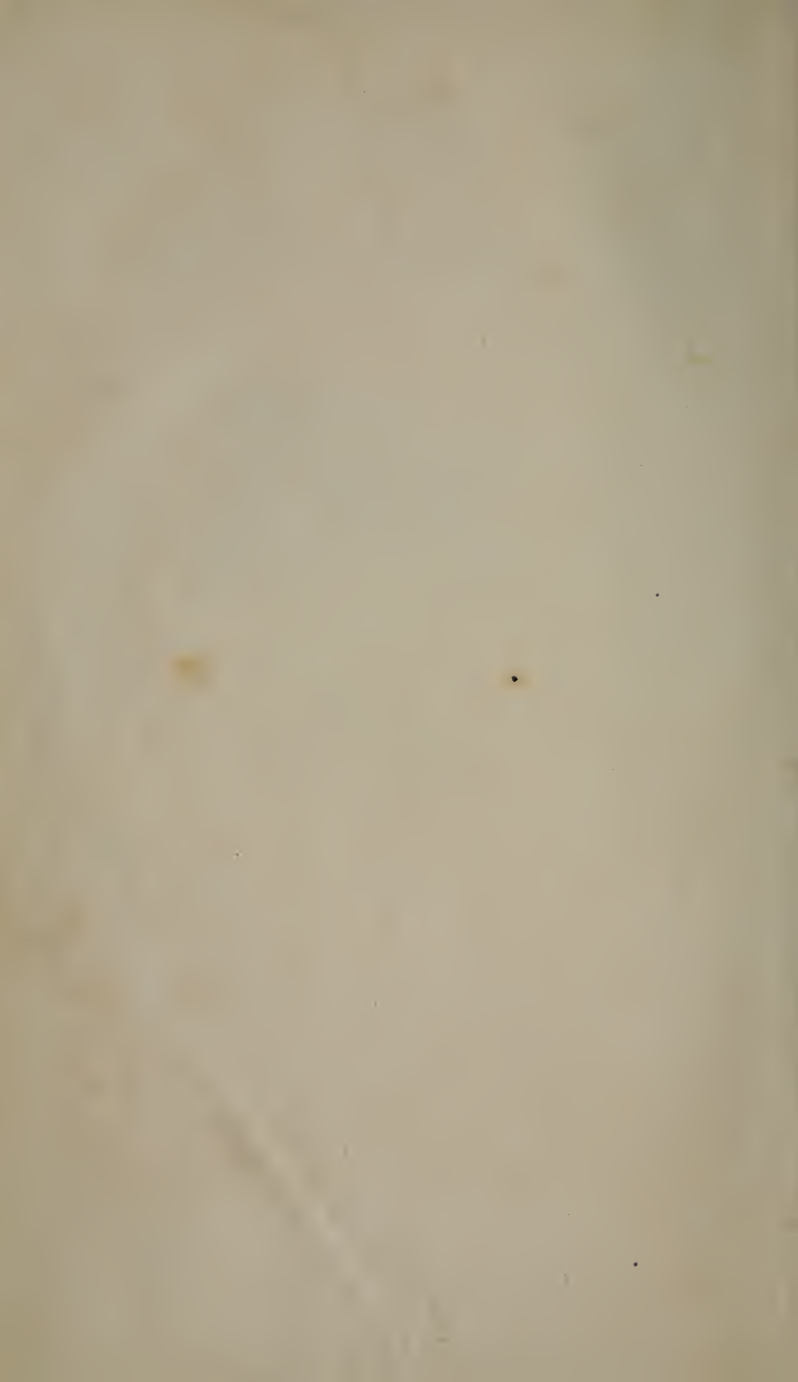


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BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE.

BY HOLME LEE,

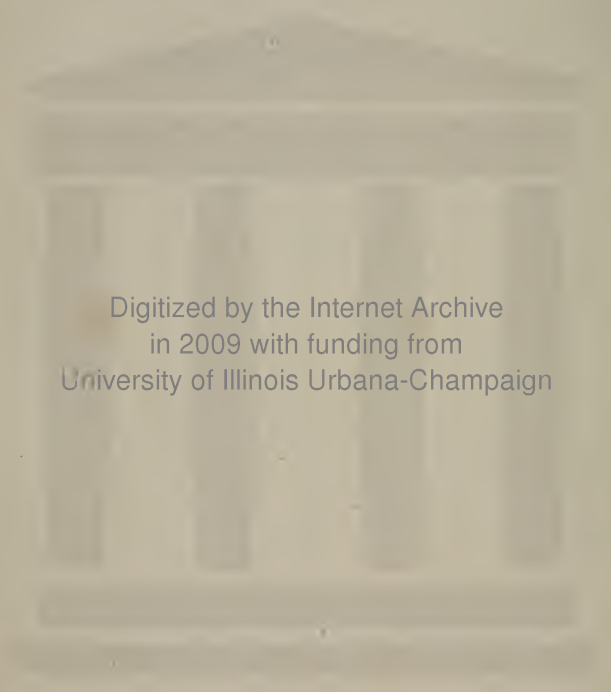
Author of "Sylvan Holt's Daughter," "Mr. Wynyard's Ward."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE.

XLIX.

A NEW INTEREST ENTERING INTO LIFE.

WHEN Midsummer Day came round again Mr. and Mrs. Paget and Joan Abbott were quite re-established in the crow's-nest, and the rectory was once more inhabited. But for the graves in the churchyard there would have seemed little change since the bright May day, two years ago, when Basil Godfrey first walked into Ashford, and saw Joan hanging her garlands from the window. She had finished the translation that she had received a commission to do, and at the blind curate's bidding, had laid by her story-telling pen in favour of more study, and the

days were never too long for the tasks imposed upon her. Mrs. Paget laughed sometimes, and said, Joan was not going into Parliament, Joan was not going to help rule the nation, or to turn professor—so much work and so little play would dull her spirits, and spoil her beauty. But her son refused to be laughed out of his system. “It is true, some men do like fools for playthings, but Basil Godfrey has chosen a companion for his wife,” said he. “Besides the girl is quick, and it amuses me to teach her, and see her learn.”

“If it amuses you, Caleb, I am content; only don’t keep her too close, to dim her eyes and fade her cheeks, or Basil will not thank you, though you make her ever so wise.”

Joan did, indeed, sometimes look pale and melancholy at this season, especially of an evening when she was tired, and remembered the old school-house, home no more, and her dear father and mother. It seemed to her that she had never had time to mourn for them duly when they died, because of little thronging cares,

perplexities and sorrows; but now these were relieved and gone, she had leisure to feel their absence, and to grieve for it often. She practised on the organ after work-hours in the high summer, and now and then her cousin Nicholas joined her at the Church, and talked to her of her parents. She always felt lighter at heart after these conversations, and as if her present life were not so much severed from her past. Then she kept up her communication with her kinsfolk at Ashleigh for the sake of her little godson, Jack Ashe, whose short coating and other infantine periods, she took great heed of; plying an ornamental needle in his service much more willingly than in her own. She grew extremely fond of the pretty lad, and found few greater pleasures than a walk to Ashleigh, and a game of play with him.

Mrs. Paget never interfered with Joan's personal wishes: she had good feeling and good taste, and might safely be left to their guidance. The old lady knew that her *protégée* had in a manner escaped her, and made her own life, and

come weal, come woe, she must abide it. There was not much society or variety at the crow's-nest, but Joan benefited by what there was. Her engagement to Mr. Basil Godfrey was now a sort of open secret, for people to discuss in whispers, and wonder at. The Squire and Mrs. Hubbard patronized her, meaning to be kind, and at the rectory she was welcomed—by Mr. Franklyn courteously, by his wife cordially, and by the children jubilantly. It was a very safe existence, dull, comfortable, uneventful; not one that any girl, blessed in a lover whom she loved, could desire to protract indefinitely.

Frequent letters passed between Ashford and Oxford until the Trinity Term came to an end, when Basil joined Colonel Godfrey in London. Then ensued a fortnight's silence on his part, followed by an announcement which the newspapers had forestalled—namely, that a dissolution of Parliament was imminent. If a dissolution took place, Basil said, it was certain that the Member for Standen, Sir Thomas Clitheroe, who had just come to his kingdom

on the demise of Sir Job, would retire from the representation of the borough, and devote himself to the agricultural pursuits, for which nature had best fitted him; and then *he*, Basil, would throw by his satchel, say farewell to Alma Mater, and offer himself as candidate for the suffrages of the free and independent electors. There would be a contest, of course, and the harder the better—he did not care to win easily.

Joan laughed for joy over the letter. Basil wrote in a gay, elated strain, delighting beforehand in the struggle, and anticipating the triumph. She also sang in her heart, “See the conquering hero comes!” and elected him forthwith by universal acclaim. Oh, how she wished that Standen were where Whorlstone was, that she might hear and see the popular enthusiasm, with which he was quite sure to be received. The dull little borough of Standen rose into a chief place in Yorkshire in her estimation, and its history she hunted through a score of dry topographical volumes. His colours were to be blue and white, and a blue and white flower she

wore in her belt from that day forward, and when she heard of the Birmingham man whose favours would be orange, she immediately discovered that turn-cap lilies and all other flowers of that hue were ugly and inodorous. Mr. Paget laughed, and said, she was a thorough-going partisan, and as her head ran on nothing but elections, he was content to listen to her reading for several days the accounts of such as have become historical.

Basil's next letter declared the dissolution imminent, then it ensued, and a few lines informed Joan that Colonel Godfrey and he were off immediately to Whinmore to lay their lines for the taking of Standen. He did not tell her all the prose of an election—indeed, he did not know it himself. His theory of a canvass was much finer than perhaps anybody's practice ever is. Colonel Godfrey who had taken part in the last, when Sir Thomas Clitheroe was chosen, stroked his grey moustache as he listened to his nephew's beautiful, disinterested, patriotic views, and was thankful that they would have golden

crutches to go on, if they were found to limp when sent forth to collect the votes of coy electors. His own principles were high, but he maintained that while the world is as it is, you must fight it with its own weapons; if he had been going to engage in a duel with a sweep, he, too, would have prepared himself with brush and soot-bag.

"There is not a chance of our seeing Basil at Ashford now," Mrs. Franklyn told Joan Abbott, towards the middle of August. "Moor-shooting is good this year, and besides, he is quite at fever heat with this election business."

"I like him to go into it with enthusiasm," replied Joan. "He reports progress to me twice a week, and the preliminaries seem rather tedious. But it is what all candidates have to go through, he says."

"Yes, if there be a contest. And this Birmingham man, Hoyle, seems determined to try it out again, let it cost him what it may. Basil however has General Vyvian, the lord of Standen manor, to back him, and the interest of

Whinmore is considerable. Perhaps it would have been greater if Colonel Godfrey had lived there more, and patronized the Standen shops. Next month there is to be a ball at "The White Hart," and Basil is sure to dance himself into a good deal of personal favour. If *we* had votes, my dear, there is no doubt who would win."

"Don't you think Basil's address to the electors, as it was printed in the Standen Gazette, beautiful?"

"*Beautiful*," repeated Mrs. Franklyn, with a queer look at Joan who blushed rosily, and laughed.

"What is in your mind, I wonder—a penny for your thoughts!" said she.

"I was reflecting on the signs and symptoms of a very pretty ambition in you, Joan. Men of the people always show direct, steady purpose, and I suppose women of the people develop the same quality in favourable circumstances. Your primitive natures are pure and fruitful like virgin soil."

“I will never use my influence with Basil but for good,” said Joan with bright resolution. “I don’t care for the material prizes of life, and I should like him to be so indifferent to them as to keep his course straight by his conscience, in equal defiance of praise or abuse. There are two or three names of living men who have had no great success, that I honour far more than some in the highest places, and I cannot comprehend the littleness of those women who will coax their masters to sell a vote for an invitation to a dance or a dinner at a fashionable house—indeed, I cannot quite believe that the thing was ever done, though I have read of it.”

“You are a charming puritan! You should have lived in revolutionary times, and not in these when all is safe and easy-going. You should have a Hampden or an Eliot for your mate.”

“I think Basil would die in the breach too, rather than give place to a tyrant, whether King or King Mob.”

Mrs. Franklyn laughed merrily. “Ah, Joan, we don’t make breaches to die in them now-a-days.

The children of the world are very wise in this generation. They listen for every rumour coming up from the great deep of the nation, and tack here, shorten sail there, drift with the current, and run before the wind. Somebody is always bawling 'breakers ahead,' and the hulk of the 'Constitution in danger,' but the steersman, whether blue or yellow, knows the strength of its old timbers too well to be frightened."

"I suppose if Charles I. had been blessed with that sort of quick hearing, he might have kept his head on his shoulders," said Joan concisely.

"I was not imputing their dexterous navigation to our rulers for blame. It is a merit in a captain to know all the signs of the weather, and to have discretion to manage his ship accordingly; and it is a merit in political captains to know the signs of the times, and to guide their course by them. Old systems change and give place to new. No more now than ever are we likely to continue long in one stay—less, indeed, for there is rapid movement everywhere."

There was rapid movement in one place at any

rate—Master Mervyn tumbling out of a big cherry-tree which he had climbed, to throw down to Olive the last left of the scarlet blobs that they both loved. Mrs. Franklyn ran, and Joan ran, but by the time they reached the spot, the young gentleman was on his feet, shaking himself, and preparing to climb again.

“If we fall we get up again,” said his mother, and saved her commiseration. “That is Basil’s way too, Joan; if he falls he gets up again, and neither he nor Mervyn will let themselves be beat.”

“I am glad of that—I like that a man should be a man,” responded Joan gaily. She was ever so much brighter and blither since an active interest had been added to her passive state of being in love with Basil. Her time of content in rest was over, and she was eager for the realities of living, doing and suffering.

L.

ELECTION PRELIMINARIES.

COLONEL GODFREY proposed to keep open house during his term of residence at Whinmore, and he invited the Lady Marian Wallace, the widowed sister of his own Lady Maria, to do the honours of hostess there, until the election was over. The gay old soldier detested an empty house or isolation in men's society. He liked bright eyes, beautiful faces, graceful forms, the life and liveliness of cultivated women; and without an agreeable decoy in his drawing-room, it would not have been easy to bring these purveyors of pleasantness about him in that quiet, rural neighbourhood. Lady Marian had three sons—in the army, the navy, and the church—but no daughters to introduce; a perpetual regret to her

since the boys had cut their leading-strings, and gone forth on their own independent paths. She made her home chiefly with her youngest son, the clergyman; but she was always available for family uses, as in the present instance, and Colonel Godfrey's request had met with a prompt and gracious acquiescence. Thus she wrote:—

“Give me a room with a north aspect, and one for my old woman, Pratt, and we are at your service, so long as frost and snow keep off. We will arrange our plan of operations when I have studied the *carte du pays*. A ball we must have at Standen for the tradesfolk, at which I will come out in a court-dress and all my diamonds. I am much prepossessed in your nephew's favour by all I hear of him, and we must do our possible to bring him in victorious. I hope there are some pretty girls at Standen, and that he is not yet a *partie prise*.”

Colonel Godfrey handed the letter across the breakfast-table to Basil, who smiled at its allusions, but did not take them up aloud. The Frenchified, fashionable dame meant “an engaged

man" by "*partie prise*," he conjectured, and then he said Lady Marian seemed to understand the business she was coming on.

"No one better," replied the Colonel. "She is a kind, spirited, cheerful woman, and a woman of the world, who does not limit it to the upper ten thousand amongst whom she was born and bred. She is an accomplished musician, a connoisseur in art; she is travelled, and is a writer in a middling way, and as handsome at sixty as she was at sixteen. I anticipate that you two will be great allies."

Basil was sure she would be invaluable at Whinmore during the election festivities and turmoil, and when she arrived, the heartiness of his welcome made her his ardent partisan at once. Her room was perfectly to her liking, Pratt's was near it, and the two old ladies, mistress and maid for forty years, being comfortable and at home in their quarters, settled to their work as if their hearts were in it.

Only the rector, Mrs. Hobbes, and their second daughter, Miss Almeria, were added to the dinner-

party on the first evening; and Lady Marian, who had already conceived ambitious matrimonial views for Basil, whose air and figure delighted her, was not altogether sorry to see that the pretty girls of Standen did not live in such near neighbourhood to Whinmore as the rectory. Miss Almeria was pleasant but plain, and though she could talk of archery-practice or politics as the occasion suited, she could not impose on the imagination or impress the heart as women with shorter noses have been known to do. Hers was preternaturally long, and long also was her upper lip, and long her chin, a fiddle-shaped face, but without vulgarity.

Election politics were the order of conversation in the dining-room, and as the party was small and intimate, the talk was general when the servants had withdrawn.

“That low, radical fellow Hoyle comes forward again, I hear,” said the rector, who had heard of little else for the last month. “One good beating ought to have been enough for him, but as it is not, we’ll do it again, Colonel,

we'll do it again." The Colonel declared himself quite equal to the occasion.

"He has a most extraordinary little wife, the man Hoyle; a sparrow of a woman, very brisk and pretty, and of views even more advanced than his own—an American, I believe, she is," said Miss Almeria.

Basil Godfrey thought she was not an American, but a native product. He said he had been rather pleased with her; she had such bright eyes, and was so much in earnest—a thorough-going woman's-rights woman. The Colonel wished to know where he had met her. Basil said, in London.

"One meets all sorts of people in London," remarked Mrs. Hobbes, in a disparaging tone.

"That is the charm of it," said Lady Marian. "I enjoy meeting all sorts of people. I must have seen Mr. and Mrs. Hoyle, too—where was it? At Grantham house, of course! He is a plump, fair man, with light hair parted in the middle, and his wife is a wonderful showy dresser?" Basil recognized the description,

and said, "Yes, those were his rivals, and he was disposed to think the lady the more dangerous."

"Is she so very singular a guy?" Mrs. Hobbes begged to know.

"Oh, no, she is the tip-top Birmingham style—she is so magnificently perfect and tiny that one longs to put a glass shade over her," said Almeria. "You may see her in Standen, every day, mamma."

"She is a sensitive little creature with the biggest notions," added Basil, kindly. "She will not accept allowances or take quarter, but will fight out her argument to the last word, her lips quivering, and all her wee frame palpitating with excitement. In the exchange of election amenities, I shall be afraid of hitting out, lest I strike that tender little breast."

"She will not be afraid of hitting you," rejoined Almeria; "and, from what I hear of her, you cannot hurt her more than by professing to spare her because she is a woman. She wrote her husband's address and election squibs the

last time, and no doubt she will do it this. She is the "Cornelia" of the "Birmingham Pioneer," and has written lots of political pamphlets. She is dreadfully clever, you know."

"Has she any personal wrongs?" inquired the Colonel.

"None that I have heard of," said his nephew. "Hoyle is a good fellow in his way; she has half-a-dozen children, a fine house, and more pin-money than I would allow my wife if she was so small."

Almeria laughed, and Colonel Godfrey went on to ask: "What does the little lady aim for? I have lived so long in a different world that I am not conversant with these new feminine politics."

"For equal rights—nothing less—and, as a first step to this, for female suffrage. Her great card is the rectification of the laws as they regard women, children, and the property of married women, and there is reason and good sense in much of what she says. But she has got up a group of extreme cases, and in the midst of

a quadrille after supper, she appealed to me whether it was a fit state of things to continue, that a man who receives a fortune with his wife, unsecured by settlements, can, if he please, will it away from her, and her children, and leave them so destitute that they may become chargeable to the parish at his death."

"But he can't!" cried Mrs. Hobbes; and Lady Marian, and Miss Almeria, both protested that it was impossible.

"It does not often happen, but the law makes no provision to hinder it. Marriage is a contract, and death ends it," said the rector quite coolly. His wife turned very red, and looked on the verge of assaulting him. Everybody else laughed at the energy of her temper, so unexpectedly roused.

"I won't believe it on your authority—you are none of you lawyers," eyeing the men with great determination.

"There is an argument for Mrs. Hoyle—she vows you would be women's-rights women every one, if you knew as much of your wrongs

as she knows," said Basil Godfrey. "I am afraid she is making a great party in favour of her views at Standen. Mrs. Hobbes, you must not forsake our flag—I, too, am a reformer in a safe way."

Mrs. Hobbes was mollified, and catching Lady Marian's eye, rose to leave the table. But her own last glance was one of indignation at the rector, who responded to it jocularly by saying: "Never mind, my dear, you and the girls are all right. I shall be the sufferer if you go first. There is a long chapter to be written yet on the wrongs of husbands whose wives' money is settled to their separate use;" and then Basil Godfrey, laughing at the conjugal audacity of the reverend pastor, closed the door on the retiring trio of ladies.

They kept up the topic in the drawing-room for a few minutes longer, and were fiercely incredulous of what had provoked their ire. "This I do know—a widow can always claim her thirds," said Mrs. Hobbes, and then Almeria, who was tiring of the subject, and would have

been willing to accept an eligible offer with all present legal limitations in full force, turned the conversation to a ball that was projected to take place in Standen in aid of the funds for adding a new wing to the infirmary. Lady Marian was very glad to hear about it.

“What most people would like would be a fancy dress ball,” said Almeria. “There are traditions of one that took place five-and-twenty years ago. Old Mrs. Rigden was describing it to us, and it was an immense success.”

“Half the pleasure of it to the Standen ladies will consist in wearing a fine suit, and in criticising their neighbours. I have no doubt it would be popular,” said Lady Marian. “Who is Mrs. Rigden?”

“Dr. Rigden’s wife. He attends here, and at all the best houses about. Miss Vyvian is quite in favour of a fancy ball.”

“And who is Miss Vyvian?—A lady of General Vyvian’s family at Standen Manor?”

“Yes,” said Almeria, with a glance at her mother, who was inclining towards a doze.

“Is she young—handsome?”

“The gentlemen consider her a superb beauty. She is very tall, large, and fair, with enormous china-blue eyes and red hair—a thorough Vyvian to look at. She extinguishes us all when she enters a room.”

“The Vyvians are great beauties young, but they grow coarse after four or five-and-twenty, and they are such a mad race,” said Lady Marian, and paused, as if turning over a thought in her mind. Miss Almeria formed a shrewd conjecture what the thought was, and had her own opinion about it. She did not believe, so far as her humble observation and judgment went, that Mr. Godfrey was any more likely to enter into a sentimental league with the splendid young lady at the Manor than with herself—perhaps even less.

She proceeded with her information. “The vicar’s family are serious, and do not patronise public entertainments. The mayor is at the head of the committee, and the others are Dr. Rigden, Jabez Hughes, Mr. Butts, Mr. Slaughter,

and the chiefs of all the trades in Standen. There are plenty of nice-looking young people, and I daresay they will get up a very pretty ball, and everybody will take tickets in the neighbourhood. It is quite opportune, this discovery of the need of a new wing to the infirmary. Colonel Godfrey's donation is very handsome, but Mr. Hoyle has doubled it. I suppose this sort of thing always goes on before an election, but it hardly seems fair to make a gentleman pay so dear for the trouble of attending Parliament. You will be present at the ball, Lady Marian?"

"I have come to Whinmore on purpose, and I have brought a court-dress of blue and silver to do honour to the occasion. A plain *toilette* would make Whinmore unpopular at once."

"Yes, we ought all to go fine. Miss Vyvian proposes to wear an eastern costume as Queen Esther; and I think of Queen Elizabeth—I am tall and have a long face like hers."

"And who is to decide this moot question of fancy ball or otherwise?"

"The committee ostensibly; the wives and

daughters and lady patronesses really. Your name and Lady Vyvian's and Mrs. Hoyle's head the list, and I think we are only waiting for your voice."

"I shall give my voice with the majority of course. By all means, let it be a fancy ball if they desire it. Those that have a taste for costume can indulge it, and those who have none, and but slender purses, can furbish up old frippery into very respectable antiques."

Here coffee was brought in, and a few minutes after came the gentlemen, and the subject of the ball was gone over again. The Colonel and his nephew were willing to agree to anything, but all conclusions were delayed until the morrow, when Lady Marian was to drive to the Manor with Basil to see the lady patronesses there.

Those with whom Lady Vyvian desired to confer had been invited to meet for luncheon at two o'clock, and as Lady Marian and her escort arrived before the rest, she had a favourable opportunity of studying the young lady of

the house. In less than five minutes she had decided irrevocably that Emmot *would not do*. The woman of the world did not attempt to reason with herself why—she simply said in her heart, *she* would not do. Yet Emmot was in great beauty; gay in blue and white muslin, and with a blue ribbon in her hair. She was in excellent spirits, and had established as familiar an understanding with Basil as he would permit. He had politicly relaxed a little towards her, perhaps in gratitude, for she was his most courageous and persevering canvasser, and his agent whispered, his most successful one. She wore no colours but his, and yet had never more occasion for large purchases at the various haberdashers of the town, or at Mrs. Glossop's millinery rooms. Miss Cute said significantly that *she* was *blue* as well as Mrs. Glossop, but *she* had none of Miss Vyvian's custom to boast of—it *might* be because she had not a *Mr. Cute to vote*; she could *not* assert it *was*, but it looked not *unlike* it.

Mrs. Hoyle arrived next with Mrs. Jabez

Hughes, the orange candidate's wife excessively nervous, but battling resolutely against her shyness, which was quite distinct from timidity—a feeling she scouted. Basil Godfrey advanced to shake hands with her, and said something laughing about their having a fight in earnest now, to which she responded with vivacity: "It shall be in earnest, I promise you!" There was something almost pathetic in the contrast between her fiery energy and her frail small person which she had not spared to embellish. Emmot, who had a big creature's contempt for little ones, looked her out of countenance, and the champion of woman's rights returned the compliment by reflecting that *she* was a handsome mass of matter with half a soul, which remnant of spirituality the flesh would evidently overcome in a few years.

Mrs. Rigden, Mrs. Butts, her daughter, and another lady who accompanied them, were rather late in appearing, but it was of the less consequence, because three minutes and three sentences sufficed to despatch the real business of the

meeting—the ball, it was voted, should be a fancy ball. Then General Vyvian came in, and led Lady Marian to luncheon; Basil Godfrey hung back to give an arm to the hostess, but was bidden to conduct Mrs. Hoyle; and the ceremonial proceeded with much lively talk, which the little radical lady's abrupt, shrill voice, continually topped in the utterance of some oracular and startling assertion.

“Man's honour woman's best safeguard! That claptrap won't wash any longer, sir, it is quite washed out. Men *have* no honour where women are concerned; they have *power*, and they mean to keep it if they can.

“Man has the loudest tongue and heaviest hand, that is the secret of his superiority; while a man can knock a woman down, that is the last argument he will use with her.

“I don't scruple to say that principles are still maintained by our Statutes as infamously unjust as that old law which, not a hundred years ago, condemned women to be burnt alive for murder and coining, when, for the

same crimes, men were quit with a good hanging.

“I protest that in common-sense, woman is the equal of her master, and in moral courage she is more than his equal. Where men will always excel us is in truckling to false expediency—the first great cause of public muddles. I blush for the scandals their meanness and cowardice creates. Look at our workhouses! It is high time, I tell you, that you had a service of female eyes and noses in authority.

“I hate the flabby principles of this generation—its blustering philanthropy and stucco morality. Hardly anybody keeps his word now-a-days. Here is a nut for you all to carry home and crack at your leisure,—how many people of your polite acquaintance, within a year’s memory, have made you pretty speeches, promises and proposals, and have forgotten them or shirked their fulfilment as a mere matter of course.”

A general laugh that might mean easy acquiescence or easy denial, greeted this sally.

Emmot testified a degree of impatience and irritability at the sound which a year or two ago she would have expressed in audible terms ; but now she controlled herself so far as to throw only contemptuous glances at “the little jay,” whose sin was the monopolizing of Mr. Godfrey’s ears. She sat silent throughout the meal herself, consuming a large quantity of dainty food and wine in a quiet, ruminative manner, until the soft rose on her face was much fuller in hue, and Mrs. Rigden ventured to remark that summer wines, though ever so light, ought not to be drunk like water. Emmot laughed with her bacchante air, and General Vyvian gave her a look which more than one of the guests intercepted. Lady Marian, who had known his family long, was startled into pity. “Poor girl—it is in the blood ! She will go the way of the last generation,” was the thought that crossed her mind and almost her lips in the shock of the moment. But Emmot was unconscious of both rebuke and commiseration. She drank another glass of pale straw-coloured liquid, professing

aloud that it was very dry and thirsty weather ; and then as the other ladies rose to return to the drawing-room, she rose too, and holding out her hand with an invitation to Basil Godfrey to come, swam after them with a slow and languid grace.

But Basil did not follow. General Vyvian detained him on the plea of comparing notes about the canvass, and they finally walked off to Standen together. The scene enacting in the drawing-room was meanwhile painful enough. Lady Vyvian looked helplessly annoyed as Emmot grew more and more excited. She volunteered to sing, and frolicked through a merry ballad that dated from her brief apprenticeship at Derby. She laughed, she cried, she stammered incoherently into an account of the circumstances under which she and Mr. Godfrey had first met ; and having awakened the round-eyed curiosity of her hearers, was, at last, with difficulty decoyed by Mrs. Rigden into a shady little boudoir adjoining, and persuaded to lie down. Lady Marian Wallace, though profoundly disgusted, joined in

the pleas the physician's wife alleged in Emmot's excuse—the sultry heat of the day, the deceptive strength of those delicious Rhine wines, and so forth—but the other ladies were not all so charitable.

Mrs. Hoyle watched and listened with an air of extreme perplexity, and on their way home into the town inquired of her friend, Mrs. Jabez Hughes, “What ailed Miss Vyvian?”

“It was plain enough to see,” replied Mrs. Jabez, reluctantly admitting evil of her neighbours. She was a good-natured woman, and worshipped the ‘quality,’ though her husband was a radical attorney.

Mrs. Hoyle was suddenly enlightened, and groaning in spirit, said: “So *young* a lady! But I have heard that great ladies habitually take too much wine.”

“Oh, that is nonsense: it is just a family vice amongst the Vyvians. Did you notice the beautiful group of three girls over the console-table in the recess? They all died before they were thirty, and of nothing else. Two of them

were married women, the third was single. You may hear it said that they were mad—well, it is a sort of madness when carried to excess.”

“What horrible degradation! The Lord preserve us from falling into it.”

“Amen. Don’t let us talk about it. These things are always kept as secret as possible, and it may have been only a solitary accident to-day,” rejoined Mrs. Jabez Hughes with an air of discretion. Both women, indeed, felt ashamed of what they had witnessed, and what it foretokened.

Basil Godfrey had some business to transact with his agent at Standen which occupied him till six o’clock, when he returned to the Manor to drive Lady Marian back to Whinmore. He found her on the terrace in front of the house, attended by Emmot, who had covered her head with a broad rustic hat, and was quite herself again. If sensible of the occasion for scandal that she had given, she contrived quite to conceal her sensibility. Lady Marian was extremely grave, and Basil’s arrival did not interrupt any conversation. Emmot and she were promenading

silently side by side, and Emmot felt her spirits rise as he drew near; she was shy of the great dame, but him she addressed with exuberant vivacity.

“Have you seen the cracked little barber, Mr. Godfrey? I have not got his promise yet, but I shall, I shall! We might open a perfumer’s shop with my purchases, they multiply so fast, and I made great way yesterday by letting him cut my hair. He is a first-rate hair-dresser, or I could not have sacrificed myself so far—not even for a vote—not even for *you*, Mr. Godfrey; and all the time I was under the scissors I was thinking *if* he should snip off a bit of one of my ears, as he did to a grammar-school boy who insulted him.”

“I wish you would give up sacrificing yourself,” said Basil, curtly. “Pray, leave little Turtell to my agent; he will know how to manage him very well.”

“But, perhaps, I have a way of managing him better,” responded Emmot, with great significance of tone and air.

"I am ready, Basil, and the ponies are waiting," said Lady Marian; and on that hint they separated.

About three miles from Standen, as the carriage left the main road for one across the moor, Basil descried, coming towards it with many a bound and spring-jack leap over the furze, a little man without a hat, of whom he said to Lady Marian that here was Turtell, the crazy barber. On he came, after reaching the smooth turf, at a rapid swinging trot, a light wiry figure and phantom face, and cried to Basil without stopping as he passed: "Running away from the devil, sir; running away from the devil!"

"Is he really insane?" Lady Marian asked.

"More knave than fool, I believe," replied Basil; "but a dangerous fellow to irritate. He is a notorious bruiser, and has bones and nerves of steel under his parchment skin. If he is mad at all, it is with vanity."

"It is very rash of Miss Vyvian to play off coquettish pranks on such a man. She ought to be warned."

“I warned her myself from the first; but the warning has only made her the more defiant and provoking.—I shall not speak again.”

“No, better not *you*. I will tell General Vyvian, and he will forbid her his shop.”

“That will be the safest plan. I think she does stand in some awe of the General,” said Basil, and then turned the conversation to another subject. Lady Marian saw, and rejoiced to see that Emmot was thoroughly distasteful to him—so distasteful that he did not even like to talk about her.

LI.

ELECTIONEERING AT STANDEN.

THE borough of Standen, though by long habit lethargic, always contrived to be thoroughly wide-awake during the upsetting of all things that precedes a general election. Like most other poor places and persons, it had private interests which could wait their opportunity, and of all opportunities an election was the finest and the least to be let slip. It was, in fact, an eminently bribable place, and the contest between Hoyle and Clitheroe had earned it a reputation amongst parliamentary agents of being a very costly borough, and one that rather over-valued the honour it conferred upon its representative. For a brief space it seemed probable that there might be

no struggle, and sad were the souls of the patriotic electors; but hardly had the cloud gathered than it dispersed, and there was certainty of a free fight and no sham.

Immediately on the dissolution of Parliament came Sir Thomas Clitheroe's resignation, coupled with Mr. Basil Godfrey's address to the free and independent electors. Then ensued a horrid silence—what was Jabez Hughes about? Mr. Hoyle was shy of offering himself again, his defeat had been so dear on the former occasion, and he had his eye on a little borough in Shropshire. The little borough in Shropshire was, however, shy of Mr. Hoyle, and, spurred by his brave wife, he came forward again as candidate for the sweet voices of Standen. Forthwith went to work diligently Mr. Cobb, the blue lawyer, and Mr. Hughes, the yellow lawyer, and all their understrappers, and the somnolent voters started up, suddenly alive to their wants and requirements as they had not been since the last election. That the Infirmary would be advantaged by the addition

of a new wing ; that the Mutual Improvement Society would be the better for having their dingy room enlightened by gas in lieu of oil ; were self-evident facts about which there could be no two opinions. There was a hint of a new bridge, but that idea both Cobb and Hughes—excellent friends non-professionally—quashed with a word, and for ever. The aspirants for parliamentary honours entered cheerfully into the views of the former bodies, and came down with liberal subscriptions to their funds. In return, the Mutual Improvement Society invited each of the candidates to deliver a lecture under their roof. Basil Godfrey gave his one Tuesday evening, and Mr. Hoyle gave his the next. Basil was satisfied to be amusing, and won much popularity by his handsome looks and good humour. If Mrs. Hoyle might have officiated as proxy for her husband, no doubt they, too, might have achieved a success ; but there were difficulties in the way of this which will be understood without explanation. Mr. Hoyle appeared on the platform unsupported by

his better-half, and talked about the Drain of Gold, with his hands in his pockets. The title of his lecture, as it appeared on the bills, was attractive from its mystery. *The Drain of Gold*—what could it mean? One had heard of the Valley of Diamonds. Miss Cute anticipated something in the nature of a thrilling romance, and her contemptuous definition of the thing afterwards as all “stuff that mattered nothing to nobody in Standen,” found a wide echo on the Market Place. Mrs. Hoyle strove to hush it by purchases of coarse straw bonnets, showy gown-pieces, and cheap corduroys, which were issued in detail from Mr. Jabez Hughes’s back door at dusk for some time after, but there could be no doubt that, so far, the light of the public countenance was on the heir of Whinmore.

The small wants of small individuals were recognized in modest seclusion by Mr. Cobb also, and as the crop sprang up rank and fast, quite a little army of gold and silver reaping-hooks were needful to keep it mown. Such trifles as

these were not, of course, bribes; they were only kindnesses to the poor and needy—Christmas doles a little out of season. Cobb and Hughes were both virtuous men, and drew a sharp line against bribes; but they contrived, nevertheless, to disperse much money under other names, neither of their clients interfering. Basil Godfrey was, indeed, expressly requested by the Colonel not to concern himself with the expenses, but to devote himself to winning favour by a diligent personal canvass; and Mrs. Hoyle impressed upon the dull imagination of her spouse, the necessity of not being too particular to know where every guinea went, if he wished to win the borough and wear it.

These were, therefore, “Heavenly times for Standen,” as Mrs. Gage, the black-eyed, buxom wife of the blue greengrocer put it. A popular heroine of elections was Mrs. Gage, terrible by length and strength of limb as well as by vivacity and keenness of tongue. No hustings’ crowd so dense but she could part it, no rough so rude but he made the Amazon way. In

common life she was a blithe good soul enough, but once let the brass bands sound in the streets the battle-notes of a contested election, and she was transformed into a furious partisan of the Conservative interest. She was, perhaps, Mr. Cobb's best card. Every day, and ten times a-day, from the top step of her dingy little shop in Lagg Lane, she harangued on the merits of the rival candidates in the freest terms of praise and abuse. She generally began her speech to a favourite neighbour at her window over the way, but always attracted a good audience before she had half done. Nobody was ashamed of stopping to listen to Mrs. Gage—she was one of the worthies of Standen—the vicar himself was known to have stopped and laughed.

She had brought Clitheroe in last time, and she'd bring in King Pippin this, bless his bonny face, she said, for cool an' sweet as a pippin it was! As for that fellow, Hoyle, let him go hang! She would like to know where he came from, that Hoyle? Standen didn't own him,

she knowed, nor yet the Riding, nor yet the Shire. He was just mill-made, was Hoyle, and not born nor bred anywhere. He was manny-factered, that was what Hoyle was—a shoddy fellow, wi' neither warp nor weft. Honest folk that knew their fathers and mothers would never vote to send him to Parliament, she was sure. He might as well save his brass and go home—if he had a home, and if not, there was the union. No, Standen would elect a gentleman or none. Standen loved a gentleman, and could not abide a fellow! And where from end to end o' England could Standen find a better gentleman than Mr. Basil Godfrey, th' auld Colonel's nephew at Whinmore?—such a sweet-blooded, kind young gentleman he was. She'd seen him with her own eyes pick up a grimy little chap as had fell down crying in the gutter—pick him up he did as tender as if he'd been a rose, and brought him to her shop to buy sweet-stuff. And the little chap's father, who was 'livering coals higher up the lane, see'd it too, and sang out, he did: “I'll gie thee a

plumper for that, Godfrey!" an' he would, for Harden was a man of his word, he was, and might be trusted with aught but liquor.

Mrs. Gage never jaded her subject or her audience. She delivered her sentiments hotly and strongly, and then, as if unaware of everybody but the neighbour over the way, abruptly retired into her shop—perhaps at the call of a customer, more probably at the howl of a child—poor Gage had his quiver full, and she was an ardent mother.

As conspicuous on the yellow side as Mrs. Gage on the blue side was Turtell, the mad barber, with whom Miss Vyvian believed she had influence enough to make him change his party. His shop was the handsomest on the Market Place, the only one shining with plate-glass, and all the fittings and dressings of the window were in good London style. He was in the habit of telling his customers that if he charged them a good price he sold them a good article, and this was the fact. He sold the best articles at the best prices, and was an admirable prac-

titioner in his art. Whence he had come nobody knew and nobody cared—possibly from some place that he had made too hot to hold him, as he was fast doing in Standen. A more litigious, bumptious, quarrelsome fellow it would have been hard to find, and perhaps there had been a larger consumption of humble-pie in the borough during the three years that he had honoured it with his residence than in the whole century before. For as the landlord of the “Bull-and-Mouth” convincingly said, Where was the shame of not standing up with a prize-fighter, for them as was not trained in the ring? “If a chap sauces you that can bowl you down like a ninepin as well, let him sauce on—hard words break no bones; and if he begins to square at you provoking, cut and run. He’ll be cock o’ the walk till the day o’ judgment for anything I shall do to clip his spurs; and what I practise I preach; which is, peace with all men.”

But though the big landlord of the “Bull and Mouth” gave proof that he considered discretion the better part of valour, the redoubtable Turtell

was not without a Mordecai at his gate—a most contemptible Mordecai, too, but not the less gall and wormwood was his denial of respect to the barber's prowess. This Mordecai was little Jimmy Gage, his mother's own boy for pluck, and without his match in Standen for impudence. He, and he alone, in the blessed ignorance and audacity of eleven years, dared to defy the bruiser in retreat. He proclaimed open war with him, called him with playful familiarity "My Rival," and challenged him to come out and fight at most unseasonably fashionable hours by dancing a nigger measure to castanettes on the broad pavement in front of his shop. Miss Vyvian had witnessed one of these pantomimic defiances on the occasion of her first visit to Turtell's shop, and having a natural turn for mischief, had been extremely delighted. Jimmy Gage peered in at the open door to begin with, and uttered a piercing whistle with two fingers in his mouth; then burst into whizzing, fizzing antics as if he had been bitten by the tarantula. Turtell's colour rose as he put up the purchases

Miss Vyvian made, until Jimmy, emboldened by impunity, snapped his castanettes with a stamp and yell in the very shop itself. Swift as thought, Turtell snatched up a pair of cold curling tongs, rushed from behind his counter, and flew in pursuit of his flying tormentor; shrieking furiously: "I'll mark you, you imp, I'll pinch your nose for you;" while all the market-place stood still to see. Apparently Jimmy did not like the look of the curling tongs, for after doubling twice or thrice, and making one complete circuit of the square, he showed Turtell a very clean pair of heels, and ran down Lagg Lane to the safe refuge of his mother's arms. The barber, bold as he was, never followed him there.

Mrs. Gage naturally set great store by her mettlesome boy, though she never failed to warn him that Turtell would catch him some unlucky day, and give him a skinful of very sore bones; and when the saturnalia of election time began, she made interest with Mr. Cobb to keep him out of harm's way, by subsidizing him as flag-

bearer in ordinary to the blue band which paraded the town for the purpose of stirring up its usually low spirits. Jimmy enjoyed his official dignity, though perhaps not so much as being altogether on the loose, and he aired it as often as possible in Turtell's view. Several times again was Miss Vyvian witness to his provocations, in which she manifested so lively an interest that the barber, conceiving he had her sympathy, by degrees unfolded to her his woes.

“What a man values is his principles, Miss; and mine, I am proud to confess, are red—red republican,” he said to her one afternoon when Jimmy had led the music triumphantly past his shop while she was there. Emmot did not understand, but she looked as if she did, and that was enough to draw him on. “When a man has suffered persecution, Miss, if he has a heart that is a heart, he hopes for revenge. I have suffered persecution, and I hope to get *my* revenge. Ah, ha! the toppling wrath, when the high shall be brought low, and the mighty

shall be abased ! Let those laugh that win, I say, let those laugh that win."

Turtell did not confine himself to words, but emphasized them by the most animated and startling gestures. A nervous system of whip-cords seemed to start out on his face and bare throat, his light blue eyes flashed, his frame quivered, and every sentence ended with a blowing of breath from his nostrils that was quite alarming. Emmot was alarmed, and drew back into the transaction of business. In a moment Turtell was himself again. "Lavender water, did you ask for, Miss? This is extra-distilled—three and six the flask. It is a long figure, but then it is a first-rate article. I should scorn to sell any article that was not the best of its kind. A tradesman has his principles, Miss, and those are mine—a good article and a fair price for it."

Some acquaintances never ripen ; others come to maturity too fast by half. Of the last was the acquaintance between the crazy barber and the beautiful young lady of the manor. Turtell,

without mincing his ideas, as a more modest man might have done, firmly believed that Miss Vyvian was in love with him. She visited his shop daily, and even twice a day, and when his orange principles were proclaimed by various devices in yellow oils, soaps and other traps of his trade in the window, she told him with her enchantress smile, that she belonged to the Blues, and she should like to convert him.

“Perhaps, Miss, it may end by my converting you,” was his reply. “A man that values his principles does not turn his coat at the bidding of a lady.”

The words and manner of the man were both respectful, and so they continued, even when Emmot sometimes forgot herself while exercising her arts of persuasion. But vanity and imagination held high revel in the secret chambers of Turtell’s breast. Emmot was idle, had leisure and money, and not much to amuse her. She chose to take up Mr. Basil Godfrey’s cause as much as if it were her own, and the election was quite a windfall of luck in making her

occasions to employ her time, and empty her purse. She had won promises of their votes from several hard-fisted artisans, who did not agree with their wives that she was a "brazen-faced hussy;" and this easy success emboldened her for the attack on Turtell, whom the General and Mr. Cobb had declared before her to be a rampant, raging radical. It would, indeed, be a triumph over the enemy if she could conquer and tame him, and in her anxiety to accomplish the task she went far. Nor was she afraid to boast how far. Mrs. Jukes, her maid, was her principal confidante, and they laughed together over the folly of the barber; but it was a mistake to boast to Mr. Godfrey in the presence of Lady Marian Wallace. Basil was angry, and Lady Marian was vexed and ashamed, and afraid for her as well. Both spoke a word to General Vyvian on his calling next day at Whinmore, and that evening he forbade Emmot, in a tone which she had learnt not to dispute, to go any more into the town unaccompanied by himself until the licence of election-time was over.

Emmot did not much care for the restriction, but she did wonder why it was imposed. Still she had the Infirmary Ball to think of, and her Queen Esther dress for it to superintend in the making; and there was always the chance that Mr. Basil Godfrey might drop in to luncheon after a morning's work with his committee at "The White Hart," or a canvassing tour in the lanes of the town.

Basil was in high good-humour in those days; he did not like Emmot, but he had not leisure to remind himself how much or why he disliked her; and a very little extra courtesy from him who had been so cool went a long way to convince her willing mind that she was prevailing over his coy affections. There had been some idea of piquing him in her heart when she made allusion to her power over Turtell, and she never recognized her blunder nor attributed the General's veto on her liberty in any way to Basil's interference.

But the restriction which Emmot bore so lightly had a very different effect on the barber.

She had not won his promise to vote *blue*, but, at her last visit, she had almost extorted a pledge that he would *not* vote *yellow*; a meed of success which she did not fail to announce to Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Cobb who came to the manor that day in company. Basil was silent at the news, but Mr. Cobb was amazed, and said in a tone of remonstrance, "You should not have meddled with that fellow, Miss Vyvian; he is not fit for a lady to speak to." To increase the attorney's horror of her evil communications, Emmot went on to tell him how she had had her hair cut and dressed, how ecstatically Turtell had capered round her, and all her terrors under his scissors, and rapturous professional enthusiasm for her long locks.

"She is the boldest woman in Standen—where the mischief had she her education?" was Cobb's opinion of her, expressed to his wife when reciting the tale for her amusement that night. Mrs. Cobb replied that Miss Vyvian was a lady who allowed herself great liberties. Cobb said, he should think she did.

Turtell had thought the same once, but his vanity had got the better of all disrespectful fancies very soon, and such as his passion and admiration were, Emmot had attracted them entirely to herself. The first day of her absence saw him only restless, darting perpetually in and out of his shop, going through pantomimic fencing and boxing matches with shadows behind his counter, and impatiently serving the customers who presented themselves before it. But on the second day, his errand-boy, scared at his furious demonstrations, absconded, and he was cried shame on by the spectators for knocking together the heads of two small urchins who had seated themselves on his door-step to enjoy at ease the music of the blue band—marshalled as usual by Jimmy Gage. A lady also who entered his shop to buy hair-pins, loudly proclaimed her thankfulness to have got out again with her head on her shoulders, and when asked what he had done, she declared that he had gnashed his teeth at her !

News of the lady's adventure was brought to

the manor, and Emmot attributing it to the real cause, laughed at it as a piece of excellent fun. Her maid, however, who was the bearer of the intelligence, looked uncommonly serious, and ventured to wish that her young lady had not "carried on so far with the crazy fellow." That evening a sealed packet was delivered at the house as sachet-powder for Miss Vyvian, which turned out to be a huge letter from Turtell. He addressed Emmot as "Madam" and "Honoured Madam" often repeated through four folio pages of high-flown manuscript, every line of which Emmot read. The pink magazine was nothing to the barber's rhapsody of passion and business. He reminded her what good articles he had always sold her, and at a price never more than reasonable; and assuming that her congenial spirit was with him, though "barriers" kept her from his shop, promised with vow upon vow to make her "most extremely happy," if she would but have the courage to entrust him with her fate.

Emmot shrieked with merriment over this

handsome proposal, but Jukes grew downright tragical, and was for having the General told. "Turtell means it, Miss : the man means it in good earnest," whispered she. "Dear, dear, what folly it has been. You thought no harm, I know, Miss, but it is like children playing with matches—before you know what they're about, there's the house a-fire."

Emmot made light of the woman's fears, and bound her to implicit secresy. "It's easy to hold my tongue—I wish it may be as easy to tie Turtell's," said the maid still apprehensive. Oh, what a godsend it would be if he'd break his neck or somebody else's head, and get himself shut up in prison a bit till he's had time to cool ! Whatever you do, Miss, don't let him meet you while he's in this fit."

The barber's letter was, as Emmot said, "nuts " to her ; but when the morrow brought her a second deceptive packet, containing a second letter, as long as the first, and consisting merely of a re-arrangement of the same phrases, she thought it tiresome. In both he entreated for an

answer, and pointed out a variety of means by which it might be secretly transmitted to him ! but Emmot, who never loved her pen, did not dream of replying. She would have sent her maid with a verbal message, but the woman utterly refused to go, alleging that to carry him a refusal would be more than her life was worth.

That evening Spade the gardener made a complaint in the servants' hall that the last two nights Turtell had walked into the roserie, and he would like to know who had given him leave or lent him a key of the gate. Nobody knew anything of his visit : " But bless you ! " cried the cook, " it isn't locks and keys 'ull keep out Turtell if he wants to be in ; he's a reg'lar Spring-jack, and can go over a fence like a bird."

" An' supposing he can, what does he want on our premises ? " persisted Spade.

" He's an impident fallow ! " said Mrs. Jukes demurely.

" Oh, he's an impident fallow, is he ? " echoed the butler, with a sly wink at Spade. Spade said

no more ; he understood and was meant to understand that Turtell was looking after the lady's-maid, and that she was not altogether unpropitious ; but his private resolve was to warn the barber away from his territories. He did not like him, and what was rare amongst Standen folk, he was not afraid of him.

Mrs. Jukes had taken, as she thought, the easiest way of diverting suspicion from Miss Vyvian, but it was news, and news the most unwelcome both to her and Emmot, that Turtell had begun to haunt the house.

“ He's set on mischief, that's my belief,” said Jukes solemnly. “ Do be persuaded to let master know, Miss ! Whatever Turtell says, nobody 'ull credit him, he's such a boastful, bragging, lying fallow.”

“ But I will not have General Vyvian told,” cried Emmot in vehement alarm. “ I could pacify Turtell with a word if I only saw him. You are such a coward, Jukes, or you would carry him a message.”

“ No, Miss, I'm not by no means such a coward,

but I'm not going into a lion's den if I know it. And a lion Turtell is for all his name's a dove. I wish we was going back to London, to-morrow, that I do!"

"To miss the Infirmary Ball and the fun of the election? I don't. I shall certainly not let fear of the barber spoil my pleasure. I do think that it is most impertinent in him to write me these letters. I'll tell you what I'll do, Jukes, I'll send them back to him."

"Oh, Miss, he will be more outrageous than ever if you do!—I think you'd best make as if you'd never had them!"

But Emmot liked her own expedient best, and Jukes having made up the documents into a parcel, similar to that in which they had come, Emmot addressed it to Turtell, writing as a memorandum across the top that the sachet-powder was not of the kind Miss Vyvian liked. Jukes took quaking possession of it, as if it were a self-exploding shell, and promised to send it into the town by the first opportunity in the morning. The first opportunity proved to be the

butcher's boy, collecting the daily orders, and to him the cook entrusted it, asking him to drop it at Turtell's shop as he passed on his way back to his master's, which he faithfully pledged himself to do.

LII.

A GARDEN FÊTE AT WHINMORE.

THE butcher's boy redeemed his pledge, and gave the parcel into Turtell's own hand as the barber stood sunning himself at his doorway, in slippers and morning-gown, preparatory to making his toilet for the busier hours of the day. Turtell read the address and the memorandum outside, and had no need to open the parcel to learn what it contained. But he did open it, nevertheless, and those who knew the man would have felt a more creeping fear of him at that moment, than in his most violent ebullitions of rage. He put the letters into a drawer of the shop desk and locked it, and then went upstairs and dressed himself in his pet summer costume of white linen, with a red silk tie under his collar turned down.

He did not swear at his house-keeper, who was also his valet, once during the operation, and when he returned to his station behind the counter, the errand-boy, whose mother had brought him back to his duty, did not know what to think of his master, he was so wonderfully mild.

Who shall say what visions of terrible and strange revenges, on the noisome woman who had befooled him, went and came before his imagination, as he sat perched aloft on his stool, a grotesque figure of vanity, mortified and enraged. For some time he beat the devil's tattoo softly on the desk; then he took out of it his letters that Emmot had returned, cut them up, and rolled the strips into gun-wads. When this was done, he visited a glass-case, in the hair-cutting parlour behind the shop, where he kept exposed a curious collection of handsome weapons, and re-arranged them on their black velvet screen. One or two inlaid tools he took out and caressed and admired them, as if they were living things to be pleased with his admiration; but his especial favourite seemed to be a dagger with a very rich handle

and short triangular blade of the finest steel, and keen as a razor at its three edges. He was in the habit of burnishing these curiosities on a dull day, but it was not often he meddled with them when there were customers going in and out of the shop every five minutes.

He was still busy with them at noon, when the blue and orange bands came playing through the Market Place with horrid rival discords; and he had not done half an hour later, when his shop-lad called out that here was the Manor carriage. The master ran to the door, but the Manor carriage rolled by, gay as a tulip-bed with ladies in gala attire. Mr. Godfrey was riding by it on Emmot's side, and she was addressing him with her exuberant vivacity as Turtell's pale eyes caught hers. She immediately became quiet, and falling back in her place, declared that there was something dreadful about that man, and she believed she was half afraid of him.

Mr. Godfrey looked provokingly indifferent to her terror—real or feigned. It was real for the moment, and Basil glancing back at Turtell, said,

he was an ugly fellow, and as bad as he was ugly. He, however, did not know the barber's face well enough to understand the rage and hate Emmot discerned in its livid, set whiteness. She wished as earnestly as Jukes could do, that she had never seen the barber; but one impression with her soon made way for another, and in ten minutes she had forgotten her alarm, and all that caused it.

Basil Godfrey had slept at the Manor House the night before, after dining at "The White Hart" with his committee, and he and the gay quartette in the carriage (Dr. Moore the vicar's two daughters were under Lady Vyvian's chaperonage for the day) were now on their road to Whinmore, to take part in a grand garden-fête which Lady Marian and Colonel Godfrey had been at great pains to organize and make a success. A large party was to come from Castle Harbinger, and the officers of the dragoon regiment stationed at Norminster had promised not only to grace it themselves with their wives and daughters (such as had any), but to give the services of their fine

band. Sir John and Lady Hobbs, Sir Thomas Clitheroe and all the county magnates for twenty miles round, had accepted invitations, as had also the *élite* of Standen, and a few important people, who were not quite of the *élite*, because it was election-time.

Whinmore was a charming place for such an entertainment. The fine old house was full of interest for its antiquity and beauty, and all the rooms and galleries were open to the guests; the formal gardens were splendid in the crimson and white, the scarlet and purple and orange of August flowers; the yew terrace was full of delicious shade for resting in the cool; and the bowling-green was delightful for dancing. And to crown all, the day was perfect.

This was a blue demonstration, a gathering of the conservative clans, and many of the young lady guests wore Mr. Basil Godfrey's colours. Miss Vyvian was especially conspicuous and magnificent in silk of the hue of marsh forget-me-nots, and Ada and Grace Moore, the vicar of Standen's modest and simple little daughters, wore blue

sashes with their white muslin dresses. There was no scarcity of beauty, but perhaps, none quite rivalled the fair splendour of Emmot. Lady Croffel was exceedingly handsome, and her sisters-in-law, the Ladies Mary Campion, Maud Douglas, and Alice Tresham, (Earl Harbinger's daughters had all married commoners of distinction) though they had the name of "The Three Graces," in great society, were not her peers so far as the eye went. For such as loved the tender charm of goodness and sweetness in womanhood, they surpassed her, but for those who regarded only the form and face, the red and white of flesh and blood, Emmot was queen.

The company arrived rapidly between two and three o'clock, and soon after sat down to a cold collation in the famous banqueting hall. Colonel Godfrey, though long unused to entertaining a multitude, was a frankly hospitable gentleman in his own house, and if he had declared the whole thing a bore, nobody would have believed that he was in earnest; they would have told him that it was a mere tyrannical fancy of his, that English

country-places are dull, and that the German Spas are, in fact, much more fatiguing. His nephew was here, as elsewhere, easy, light-hearted, gay, and popular. Some of the young ladies who were not beautiful, good-humouredly objected to his handsome face, and vowed that he was conceited; but they allowed that he was a very nice fellow, notwithstanding, and forgave him his faults of their own invention, when they found that he was disposed to dance with them as frequently as with girls of acknowledged beauty.

During the collation the military band played in the quadrangle, and when the guests began to pour forth from the hall, they marched away through the gardens, and down the steps to the bowling-green. This was soon gay with girls as the garden with flowers; and being shaded by high beech-trees on all sides, was agreeably cool and fresh with the air blowing between their smooth and silvered boles. After a little loitering and laughing, promenading, and introducing and renewing of acquaintance, the music, at a concerted signal, burst into a lively measure, and Basil

Godfrey opened the dance with Lady Crosfel. The elders, and those who were almost strangers, watched from the terrace for some time; Lady Marian Wallace moving to and fro amongst them, a gracious and kind hostess; making Mrs. Cobb feel more at home, and less conscious of an unbecoming bonnet, and persuading Mrs. Rigden, who was sleepy and did not like to seem so, to retire into the great drawing-room, and doze in peace for half an hour.

There was a very even proportion of partners, and space enough for all to dance that would. Basil Godfrey was indefatigable. There was not a better dancer in Europe than he, and one sprightly young lady exclaimed with enthusiasm after a beautiful waltz: "What a shame it is to make a Member of Parliament of you, Mr. Godfrey, when everybody can talk, and so few men can waltz!" Basil pleaded that Members of Parliament were not forbidden to waltz. "My dear boy, that is all you know about it!" said she with an air of supreme pity. "Before Cousin Jack went into The

House, he was perfectly charming: *now* he is of no use at all when we are up in town. If there is a fête, or a flower-show, or a morning concert, he has a committee to attend. If there is a ball, there is sure to be a debate that keeps him an hour or two past midnight. And worse than all, he has taken to spectacles—blue spectacles—Cousin Jack who has such beautiful blue eyes! That is what *you* will come to—I wish everybody would vote for Mr. Hoyle. Shall we go on again?"

They went on again, and did not cease till the music stopt for want of breath in the musicians. Then they came to a rest, as it happened, close by the place where Miss Vyvian was seated, and looking up at Basil enchantingly Emmot said: "You have never asked me to dance yet, Mr. Godfrey."

Basil, a little excited, made her a superb bow, and begged for the honour then; and led her, smiling and blushing resplendent, to the top of the quadrille that was forming. Lady Hobbes and her sister-in-law were amongst the

witnesses of this little episode, and after a few minutes spent in silent observation of the handsome couple, Lady Hobbes said: "You must be mistaken, Amina, there is certainly an understanding between those two."

"I don't believe it; it is only her effrontery," replied the clergyman's wife.

Another witness was Colonel Godfrey, who was pleased, and a fourth was General Vyvian, whose red face grew more red as he watched the young lady of his family. The two gentlemen were standing together, and Colonel Godfrey said in a low voice to his friend: "Nothing would gratify me more, if it could be." The General stared straight before him as if he did not hear. Perhaps he was thinking that only a fool would put his honour in Emmot's power, and that Basil Godfrey was certainly not a fool. Nothing in the form of affection had been developed between the father and his natural daughter; and their conjunction, after several fluctuations in the atmosphere of home, was beginning to prove itself a failure.

Lady Vyvian disliked Emmot, whose leading trait in her prosperity was selfishness, and the General would have been mightily relieved if he could, without scandal, have relegated her for ever to her early obscurity. But Emmot was not a person to be lightly disposed of ; and now that she had enjoyed experiences of high life and luxury, she would not soon let go what she had achieved.

Lady Hobbes was not without that interest in her neighbours' affairs which becomes a kind-hearted woman, and she made an attempt on Lady Vyvian to verify her observations respecting Mr. Godfrey and Emmot. But Lady Vyvian was not communicatively disposed ; and whatever her opinions, she kept them to herself. Lady Marian Wallace was less cautious. She shook her head at Lady Hobbes' conjectures—No, she did not think Mr. Godfrey had any views in that quarter ; indeed, she might say she was *sure* he had not. Lady Hobbes, still only half convinced, remarked that it would be great promotion for Miss Vyvian, beauty tho' she was.

“My dear Lady Hobbes, Miss Vyvian will never attain to it,” replied Lady Marian with firmness.

Yet what Lady Hobbes observed, the majority of the guests observed, and what she thought, they thought. Emmot pretended to a peculiar intimacy with Basil; claimed his attention as by right, and rewarded him with confidential whispers and sweet smiles. “She made love to him with all her might, and before everybody,” Mrs. Cobb told her faithful gossips afterwards. Basil did not appear to care for the special favours lavished on him. His manner was a little exaggerated in its courtesy to Emmot, as if he were making fun of her. But she liked being treated in this imperial way, and did not detect the sarcasm it scarcely concealed. Perhaps he thought that if she would have his homage, she should have it without stint or reserve—or perhaps he did not think seriously at all. His duties carried him frequently away from her, and he could not fail presently to notice that good-natured people

made them quiet opportunities of being together. Innocent Ada Moore, who was about to dance with him once, seeing Emmot unprovided with a partner, said : “ Oh, Mr. Godfrey, never mind me ! dance with Miss Vyvian ; it is so beautiful to see you.” Basil replied that he would much prefer to dance with her, and despatched a dragoon to the enchantress. But for all that he could do or leave undone, the almost universal impression of the company at the Whinmore Fête was that Mr. Godfrey and Miss Vyvian were likely to make a match of it, and that when they did, they would be the handsomest couple in England.

Colonel Godfrey had something to do in creating this impression. He waited on Emmot with stately kindness when she expressed a wish to see the beauties and curiosities of the old house, and perhaps made the exploration longer and more tedious than she altogether liked. When they passed through the great drawing-room, Mrs. Rigden was still comfortably resting there and chatting with some Standen

folks of her friends, who all, of course, took notice of the pleasant way in which the old Colonel was gallanting the young lady of the Manor about. In one oriel window Lady Hobbes and Mr. Tresham were holding a low-voiced parley, and in the other a group of gentlemen were gathered in high debate on the elections; and these also observed the honour and respect the master of Whinmore was paying to the lovely Miss Vyvian.

Several of the lattices stood open, and the music on the bowling-green floated in here, softened and sweet. A delicious waltz was in progress, and at the inspiring strain Emmot made a graceful spring, intimating her desire to return to the dance.

“We will go out this way—through the little library, my nephew’s sanctum,” said the Colonel, and opened a door which had till then been held sacred by the company.

Mr. Tresham and Lady Hobbes, who were also on the move, followed them. Lady Hobbes knew the house perfectly, and the exit from the

little library by Lady Cicely's doorway upon the terrace. The room had all the signs of a busy man's occupancy, and was the shrine of that exquisite picture of "Lovers surprised" which contained Basil Godfrey's and Joan Abbott's portraits. Emmot paused at sight of it dumb and motionless. Then the Colonel remembered his nephew's desire that his sanctum should not be invaded; and reclosing the door by which they had entered, said laughing, they must all come away, and set the example himself by descending at once to the terrace. Mr. Tresham followed, but Lady Hobbes lingered, admiring the picture, and trying to interpret it. As for Emmot, she could quite, with her previous knowledge, make out the story: Mr. Godfrey, at Ashford Rectory, had fallen in love with Joan Abbott, at the crow's-nest, in those humble days when he was not yet heir of Whinmore. What she failed to make out was whether the love continued. She stood, hardly breathing for several minutes, and it was with a blanched face and angry brow that she moved

away from the picture on hearing Mr. Godfrey's voice as he ran up the steps from the terrace.

"We are intruders, but you must blame the Colonel," said Lady Hobbes as he appeared. "You may well wish to shut out visitors if you live in such a confusion of books and stationery as this"—pointing to the loaded table and encumbered chairs.

As they were not wanted, of course several more inquisitive persons came too, and Basil, unable to eject them politely, gave one glance round, which took in Emmot's face, and left them in possession. A few minutes after his retreat, Lady Marian entered, just in time to hear a few whispered laughing words about "A Fair Rosamond and a bower at Ashford," which she did not at first comprehend. Then she caught sight of the picture, as new to her as its other admirers, and she perceived that the mysterious, significant allusion originated with Miss Vyvian, and referred to the sweet face of the girl in the picture.

"I do not believe it," said she aside to Lady

Hobbes, and Lady Hobbes replied in the same tone that she did not believe it either, and then they looked at it again together, and declared the two heads were perfect; and Lady Marian made up her mind to put Basil Godfrey to the question, ordinary and extraordinary, but she would find out the truth of the matter.

She executed her resolution the same evening when the guests were gone, and they happened to be alone in the drawing-room for a few minutes—a very few, but they sufficed for her purpose.

“You keep a gem of art hidden in your sanctum, Basil: who was the painter?” she inquired.

“Philip Baines—but do you not mean who is the fair ladye of the picture?” said Basil cunningly.

“Yes, I do—tell me about her. I suppose she is your lady-love?”

So Basil told her how he and Joan had met and fallen in love, and who Joan was, and how they had plighted their troth, and how, in spite

of all obstacles, he meant to live and die true to her, and never wed woman but her—all in romantic, poetic phrase which made Lady Marian think that he was either not quite so much in earnest as he fancied, or else that he felt a little shyness of revealing to her Joan's simple condition.

“You have a very fair excuse for a very great folly,” was her comment on the whole story.

Basil remained silent for a minute or two, and then said with deliberation: “I do not acknowledge that it is a folly—Joan is the best and dearest friend I have. I love her with all my heart—I would willingly lose my election rather than imagine for a moment that I may lose her. She is an equal companion to me—a loyal, tender soul as ever lived. I feel in myself now an ambition that I never felt before the door of opportunity was opened to me, but Joan makes the sweetness of my life still—if she were to drop out of it, I should keep the road no doubt, but it would be dull weather with me instead of sunshine.”

Lady Marion smiled on him more benignly

now—she could admire the beauty of an unselfish love. “Then do not let her drop out of it,” said she. “When a man has the courage of his fortune, he has these things always in his own hand.”

“That is what I am sure of, and when I am firm in my saddle, I shall take up Joan on the crupper. I wish you knew her, Lady Marian. She has a thousand looks as lovely as that in the picture; she sings like a bird out of the pure music of her heart; she has been brought up by a charming old lady, and a famous blind scholar, and can talk to you as wisely or as simply as you please. Her mother, tho’ quite the peasant, was a sweet woman—I know no other description for Mistress Abbott than ‘a sweet fair woman,’ and Joan is just a copy of her young—”

“Then be faithful to her—I have no such paragon to recommend you,” said Lady Marian, half laughing at his enthusiasm, yet fully believing it. “A girl so beautiful as that picture, and rarely endowed as you describe, can discredit

no man's choice. Colonel Godfrey has not said a word of her to me, though we have talked much of you. I presume, therefore, that he is not quite one with you in the matter?"

"No, nor is he violently against me. We have not quarrelled, nor must we quarrel about it. He knows my mind, and we maintain a silent truce. I shall wait, and all will work round as I wish it, by and by.

"Practise a reasonable patience — no more, Basil. If your marriage is really to be, I should say, let it be soon—the sooner the better. She will fall more easily into our ways."

"But my uncle must give her a good welcome as my wife—not merely receive her on sufferance."

"He ought to know her to be able to love her. Would it be a good thing to have her here now for a little while?"

"If he would consent, it would be an excellent thing!" cried Basil, delighted at having won an advocate.

"You would like it? You do not fear for

her the contrast with fine ladies, or any scorning or flouting of her?"

"Not I! She has too much natural dignity and grace. I don't think man or woman either could be impertinent to Joan Abbott. There is one thing she can do better than any fair lady of all our guests to-day—she can look lovelier, and women respect in each other what they know to be their greatest power."

"You are a partial witness. Is she handsomer than Miss Vyvian?"

"Miss Vyvian!" echoed Basil with superlative contempt. "I consider that dear, good-natured, fiddle-faced Almeria Hobbes nicer looking than Miss Vyvian!"

"You are jesting, Basil!" remonstrated Lady Marian.

"I am in earnest; I stare at Miss Vyvian sometimes until I fancy I see the devil. She is temptation incarnate."

"Hush! you were very attentive to her, to-day."

"I wish she were—where Pharaoh's chariots are."

“That is enough; I see you know something about her more than the rest of the world. I will not hear it now; you shall tell me another time. Here comes the Colonel. I shall take the first opportunity of pleading your cause in that other matter.”

“Lady Marian, you will make me eternally grateful!”

Colonel Godfrey came slowly up the room to where they stood, and the private colloquy of the conspirators against his prejudices was brought to an end. Basil looked extraordinarily gay as if it had done him good, and completely abolished the fatigue of his exertions in the bowling-green.

LIII.

A GARDEN SCENE AT THE MANOR.

SPADE, the gardener at the Manor House, was not averse to Mrs. Jukes having a lover, but he was very averse to having night-prowlers in his garden, especially when nectarines and peaches were ripe on south walls. He consequently set a watch that night after the fête at Whinmore, and when all the house was still a-bed, he came slipping in shoes of silence from shadow to shadow, and from one point of observation to another until he reached the river, which ran between the Manor Gardens and the town. Looking along the bank in the hazy moonlight, he saw a canoe moored under the shade of overhanging bushes, and said in a voice of smothered rage that the rascal was there

again, but he would find out his game, and not let him off as easily this time as he had done last. He began by sending the canoe adrift to hinder the marauder's escape, and then, skirting by a cat's path through the shrubberies, he loosed the house-dog, and bidding him keep quiet at heel, took his way to the rosery, which was overlooked only by the windows of Lady Vyvian's boudoir, and Miss Vyvian's bedroom above. Just at the gate he met Turtell outside it, and opened his business by saying ironically that he would be much obliged if the barber would take his walks by moonlight alone elsewhere than in his gardens. Turtell hurled a curse at the man, and declaring his intention of coming and going as he liked, defied him to hinder it.

"Ho, ho! that's it, is it? Hold him, Crusty," cried Spade, and in a second Crusty had the barber by the linen leg of his trowsers. Another second, however, and Turtell struck at him with something in his hand, and the dog, with one strangled howl, rolled over dead.

"I'll serve you the same if you come a step nearer," said the assassin, in a voice cold and steady as steel.

But Spade had hot blood, and a stout stick which was a match for the knife. One quick, well-struck blow on Turtell's wrist broke it, and the weapon dropt on the grass. Swift as thought, Spade picked it up, and flung it far away into the shrubbery. "Now you'll go along wi' me," he said, feeling himself master of the situation. "If you'd stuck to fists, I'd ha' letten you off again, for fists is fair play; but I'll ha' no marcy on prowlers as carries knives."

"Your master won't thank you for this service," replied Turtell in a thick voice.

"I'll wait an' see," said Spade bluntly. "You can tell your story to him to-morrow morning. I'm only the police, he's the magistrate. Come along to my lock-up; it ain't far, no farther than t' tool-shed."

Turtell was not disposed to accept the invitation; he was mad with pain, rage, disappointment, and he was still a man though his right

arm was broken. Spade approached to enforce compliance, and got a hard left-handed blow which staggered him, but he closed with his antagonist, and both came to the ground together. The noise of the fray increased as they struggled, and was heard at the house. An upper window opened, and the General's voice called out to know what was to-do. Spade made his communication short and clear, and was excessively disgusted when a bidding, equally short and clear, to let the fellow go, sounded in his ears.

“Master may watch his wall-fruit hisself for me from this time forward for ever more,” said he with angry unction. “You’re to go, d’ye hear? Such varmint ain’t worth keeping. Be off.”

Turtell was in no condition to make haste. He gave the dead dog a kick as he passed it, and took his way to the gate nearest the town. Spade let him out, and locked it behind him, and then returned to his lodging over the coach-house, cogitating deeply in his mind: “It’s not Mistress Jukes the barber’s after, don’t let

her tell me that. It's Miss herself, an' a bowld piece she is. That would be a pretty picter o' woman and her master! I should like to see it—they'd be about a match." From which it would seem that Emmot was not much beloved amongst the domestics at the Manor.

Turtell's shop on the Market Place was not open the next morning at eight o'clock, nor were the shutters taken down all day. Wonderful exaggerated rumours had gone abroad of the barber's having tried to break into the Manor House for purposes of robbery; then of ropeladders, elopements, and a certain young lady; but as the certain young lady was seen riding out with General Vyvian at noon, as bright as the day, and not at all like a love-sick damsel, stopt in flight with a lover, that tale was discredited. Then Turtell was asserted to be dead, and the keeping up of the shutters and down of the blinds gave substance to that report, but when Dr. Rigden was seen to go into the house twice, it was asked what he should do there, if the man was dead? The shop was shut because

Turtell had had an accident, and could not attend to the shop—that was all. Before night Spade's version of the story—facts free of conjectures, was in all mouths, and it was generally believed and said that the mad barber had fallen into captivity to the beautiful Miss Vyvian, that in attempting to gain an interview with her, he had killed the house-dog, and had a fight with the gardener, and had got his arm broken in the scuffle. Just a few persons sneered significantly at Miss Vyvian's share in the scandal, but words did not go beyond whispers, and while the miserable Turtell was suffering his penalty, and tossing with pain and fever on his thorny bed, she was flourishing abroad as if no care had ever come nigh her. But the General had a very grim countenance towards her in these days, and if she had been apt at reading faces, she would have understood that it behoved her to take special heed to her ways, for it boded her mischief.

Meanwhile electioneering went merrily on, and the great event of the Infirmary Ball came off.

LIV.

THE INFIRMARY BALL.

LADY MARIAN found no difficulty in bringing the cause of Basil Godfrey and Joan Abbott before Colonel Godfrey, but she found insuperable difficulties in bringing him to think as she did. He was kind, generous, noble, but full of the prejudices of race, and ignorant to an almost inconceivable degree of the ways and manners of all ranks but that to which he belonged.

“Joan Abbott is pretty and good, and very admirable in her condition, no doubt, but she would look and feel quite out of place amongst us,” said he. “How can it be otherwise? a person of the servant-class.”

“I think Basil will certainly marry her, and that is why she should have the advantage of

seeing something of us beforehand, while she is young and pliant," urged Lady Marian.

"He ought not to marry for half a dozen or ten years to come! Far be it from him to deal dishonourably by the girl, but let them wait, and time will open both their eyes to the folly of their little romance. To invite her here would be to clench the engagement, and to countenance it—much better not. An unequal marriage of that sort, at the beginning of his career, might ruin his prospects for life."

"She is not a common character from his account."

"His account, my dear Lady Marian! *His* account—an infatuated lover's account of his mistress! Basil has a tongue which would wile the birds off the trees! His sister described her to me a couple of years ago as a simple-minded girl, very beautiful, and a nice singer in the church choir, and well enough taught to be herself a teacher; and Parson Franklyn assured me that so far as his judgment went, it ought not to be a marriage between her and my nephew,

and that she would be better matched with some cousin at Ashford who is a blacksmith."

"That is an opinion out of date: she has been to Rome since then—which implies much. Basil speaks of her as a cultured, refined, beautiful soul—he speaks of her too as a woman quite capable of holding her own in our society. I agree with you that an ill-assorted marriage may mar a man entirely, and if this were just a rhapsodical passion for a lovely milk-maid, I should hope and expect to see it die; but it is an attachment of nearly three years' growth, and may be considered well-rooted enough for permanence."

"If they are to marry, he might as well relinquish ambition, and settle down into a plain country squire. I will give him up a house and farm in Hampshire to-morrow, if his heart is set on it!" The Colonel spoke in a vexed, disappointed tone, and began to walk to and fro the room. Lady Marian was perplexed and silent for a minute, doubtful whether she was not doing more harm than good by her inter-

ference. Anxious to oblige Basil, and equally anxious not to annoy his uncle, she took refuge in generalities.

“Plain squiredom is a delightful state of being for well-constituted minds, but there is a vein of genius in Basil Godfrey which makes him too restless for the enjoyment of country paradise. There is an old adage which says that a man has to ask his wife whether he shall succeed in the world or not. Certainly nobody can be such a clog at a man’s heel as a bad and foolish wife; but at the same time, no one can do so much as a tender and noble wife that a man loves, in sustaining his energies and encouraging his aspirations.

“I have no desire but for Basil’s greatest good, you may be sure of that,” replied the Colonel.

“And he believes that in this peasant girl, bred a gentlewoman, he has found it—that she will be a true helpmate for him; and he has persuaded me to believe it too. I wish you would see her—if you will not have her here,

take Ashford in your next journey to town, and see her there?"

"Well, I can do that—it pledges me to nothing," said the old man reluctantly, feeling himself very ill-used in being so over-argued. Why could not his nephew choose a wife in his own class—a magnificent creature like the young lady at the Manor? That young lady herself, indeed, he thought; and after thinking it for a moment or two with rising ire, he gave it expression. Lady Marian had him at an advantage here, and she did not let her advantage slip.

"Ah, Colonel, is it possible that you can have allowed yourself to be so deceived," cried she with laughing rebuke. "Basil had better make a vow to marry the first girl he meets in the morning, and take his chance with her, though it were stout little dairymaid Betsy, than cast in his lot with Miss Vyvian! I say nothing of her birth; I grant you her beauty, her vivacity, her glorious voice for a song, but she has a coarse mind and hereditary depravation to prepare her

for coarse habits. She is the sort of woman to break a man's heart, and drag his name in the mire. Hear what report of her they have in Standen; ask Basil himself what he knows about her. Watch her at the ball to-night, and you will see that no lady is friendly with her."

"You amaze me!" said the Colonel—quite unnecessarily, for he was a picture of amazement. This then was why his old friend, the General, had kept silence when he hinted a wish to him that Basil and Emmot might marry. "I never set up for a judge of the sex," he added with a sort of apology. "My mother and sisters and wife were good women. I have fancied that young lady a little loud and vulgar now and then—let us say no more about her." He was very glad to dismiss the subject, and was rather ashamed of having selected a wife for his nephew and a mistress for Whinmore of whom a woman of the world could speak in such terms as Lady Marian spoke of Miss Vyvian. He never doubted the justness of her judgment for a moment: it did not occur to him to believe that

she might be equally wise in the counsel she offered in the case of Joan Abbott.

When Lady Marian reported her small success to Basil Godfrey, he expressed himself as not dissatisfied. "Let him see her here or there, it is all the same," said he. "Joan is never more or less than a bright, modest, lovely girl. She may not be perfectly *up* in the customs of the fashionable world—I am almost sure she would blush at the sight of her fair self in a modern evening dress, and I know she cannot spin round like a teetotum; she has not yet sat at the head of a state dinner-table, or acquired the art of talking easily about nothing; but I protest that she looks very graceful pouring out tea, and that she can talk about a variety of agreeable subjects as charmingly as any hostess who ever entertained me. I am always proud of my darling when I see her through the eyes of other men, and indeed, my uncle knows me very little if he supposes that I should ever take a wife to be ashamed of her."

"I am sure you would not," responded Lady

Marian. "Be faithful, and he will come round to your views presently."

"It is quite certain that he will never draw me round to his."

This short colloquy took place just before Lady Marian went upstairs after dinner to put some final touches to her dress for the ball. The drawing-room had been full of company until five minutes since—guests gathered from afar to increase the Whinmore party and popularity, who were now scattered to their rooms to embellish and cloke themselves for a start. By-and-by, they re-assembled by ones and twos and threes: Lady Marian in her diamonds and court dress of blue and silver; Mrs. Hobbes darkly splendid in black lace sprinkled with gold stars; Almeria, her fiddle-face framed in a vast Elizabethan ruff, and her short stiff skirt all over painted eyes,—a wonderfully ugly costume, but excellent to stare and laugh at. Colonel Godfrey appeared as an old cavalier in brown velvet, and Basil was magnificent in a wedding suit of white satin. Lord and Lady Crosfel wore costumes of the

Louis XIV. period: there was a Sir Roger de Coverley, an Admiral Benbow, and a Guy Fawkes; a Flora Macdonald, and a Knight Templar; Shylock, and two Spanish ladies; Romeo and Don Quixote; a Neapolitan flower-girl, and not less pretty, a round, rosy-faced Standen charity-school girl in the short scarlet frock, trim buckle shoes, white apron, bib and neckerchief, and a winged cap, that all the town was familiar with on Sundays, when forty little lasses, fatherless or motherless, marched in pairs to the parish church.

Lord Crosfel's omnibus, the officers' drag from Norminster, and two carriages conveyed the party, and brought them soon after nine o'clock to "The White Hart," every window of which shone luminous upon the Market Place. The party from the Manor had immediately preceded them—the General in uniform and his orders, Lady Vyvian as an Indian Princess, Emmot—as anything sumptuous in loose white raiment, and her hair about her shoulders—her Queen Esther dress had not become her when

made, and, at the last moment she had fallen back with perfect success on nature unadorned. A fillet of silver ribbon bound her head, and a faint Greek border edged the flowing spotlessness of her draperies. Her arms were bare to the shoulders, a string of pearls was round her throat. "What a glorious woman!" said some. "She is not fit to be seen," said the majority. "What is she—a Muse? A slave exposed for sale?" Nobody could guess. The young ladies were sure it would be an awkward dress to dance in; the criticisms of the gentlemen were only audible amongst themselves, but Emmot did not lack enthusiastic admirers.

Mrs. Hoyle as Queen Mary Stuart attracted not much attention that was complimentary—why had the wee woman put herself in comparison with the famous regal syren? Her husband had habited himself all in drab like a Roundhead, and a very droll couple they looked as they came up the room—he sober as a Quaker, she fine as a sweep on May day. They were the last to arrive of the more distinguished patrons of the

ball, and dancing had already set in with great spirit.

Mr. Cobb had furnished Basil Godfrey with a list of the Standen girls whom it would be good for him to lead out as partners, and he was doing his duty with commendable vigour. If Mrs. Hoyle's theory of female suffrage could have been converted into a practical measure that night, she and her spouse might have at once retired from the election-field—they would not have got a single hand; to a woman, the room would have voted for that “dear, darling, handsome fellow, Mr. Basil Godfrey!”

The professional folk and well-to-do tradesfolk of the town had mustered in force—gentlemen's tickets seven-and-sixpence, ladies', five shillings. A large infusion of Sunday coats, high satinette gowns, and flowery caps appeared amongst the elders, but most of the young people had done up their hair queerly, or powdered it, or tied scarves over their shoulders, or added some trifle to their white muslin frocks by way of fancy dress; and the scene altogether was quite gay and

pretty enough to be pleasantly remembered and talked about for a generation.

Mr. Basil Godfrey danced sedulously until nearly supper with the daughters of borough-voters who were his friends, perhaps to the neglect of the greater ladies present; but they understood this as an occasion to be improved for business, and none, except Miss Vyvian, took his neglect as a discourtesy. Many a moment of vain speculation had she spent on his private affairs since the day at Whinmore, when the discovery of Joan Abbott's portrait in his sanctum had been a startling revelation to her. She had consulted Jukes about it, who warned her seriously against letting her mind run on a man who had given her such slight tokens of favour as she could cite against Mr. Godfrey. But she would not be warned. Such heart as she had was set on him, and she could not look in the face the possibility that his was securely barred against her fascinations by a perfect, pure, and holy love. She thought of fifty ways of trying him and proving him, but as usual, when the

time came, she let her designs slip, and acted on the impulse or caprice of the moment. She had meant to-night to dazzle him by her triumphs over other men, but when she found herself unnoticed by him, she chose to sit splendid and sullen against a background of evergreens which composed well with her figure, never dancing once, though repeatedly entreated. At last, as Basil's evil genius would have it, he happened to espy her handsome, inharmonious face in a pause when he had no partner engaged, and he asked her.

"What is it?" said she, with languid negligence.

It was a waltz, and the music delirious. The enchantress's indolence fell from her as she stood up. Mrs. Butts closed her demure eyes. Mrs. Hoyle opened hers and wondered at the way of the aristocracy. Basil would fain have released himself soon, but Emmot was fresh, vigorous, untired, and said, No, energetically, they must dance the dance through, for she had never danced with so perfect a partner.

They were still whirling round, when the doors of the supper-room opened, and it became Basil's duty to lead her in. She looked gloriously contented and radiant now, and a whisper went round and round that was significant enough as confirming the rumour that had been set abroad after the Whinmore fête. It had come to Basil's ears, and he was wrathfully conscious of what people were thinking and saying as he entered with her on his arm—he the hero of the night, both of them too conspicuously handsome to escape admiring and critical notice. Emmot was no less aware of the general observation than himself, but it gratified her intensely; for, next to the reality of Basil's homage, she coveted the appearance of it, and to have the honour of his worship attributed to her.

Basil placed her at the table, but did not seat himself beside her, notwithstanding her invitation twice repeated with pressing words and gestures. Most of the gentlemen were standing, waiting their turn, as there was not room for all at once; and that Basil should stand, and

when two or three of Emmot's more ardent admirers engaged her attention, should move away to pay his devoirs to some less brilliant *belle*, was quite natural. Emmot did not discover his defection for some minutes, so agreeably was she absorbed with her chicken and champagne, which she took like a fatigued, unromantic dowager of many seasons rather than a young and lovely girl; but as soon as she saw that he was gone, she said, with a frank tone of command to those about her: "Where is Mr. Godfrey? I want him. Find him for me, somebody, if you please."

Basil, however, was rather long in being found, or else he delayed to obey her summons. Most of the ladies returned to the ball-room, but Emmot still lingered at the table, deserted at length by all but one grey mischievous old satyr, who plied her with bantering compliments, and, at the same time, kept her glass replenished with wine. Drowsy Lady Vyvian was the least watchful of chaperones, the General had supped and gone back to whist in

the card-room, and the heedless enchantress was left to her own devices and the sly temptation of the man who was amusing himself with her weakness. Good old Mrs. Rigden invited her once to come away, but she declined on the plea that she was waiting for Mr. Godfrey; and when Mr. Godfrey, sought out and despatched to her by the doctor's wife, arrived, she looked flushed, defiant, elated—a bacchante all over.

“Here you are at last,” cried she. “I thought you had forgotten me—pray do not leave me again.”

The other man stood aside with a disappointed grin, and Basil offered her his arm with a very grave, reserved courtesy, and led her, not back to the ball-room, but to another exit by which they could reach the vestibule without passing through a crowd.

“Where are we going? I am in much better dancing cue now than before supper,” said Emmot, stopping short.

“Lady Vyvian wishes to leave—it is past

twelve," replied Basil. "The carriage will be round in a minute or two—we might as well go into the fresh air."

"To leave! and we have only had one dance! We must have another waltz! *You* are not going away?"

Basil said he should go as soon as his duties permitted him, and while she was urging a return to the ball-room, and he was politely declining to conduct her thither, General Vyvian came out with his sleepy wife. Emmot reiterated to him her desire to stay longer, but the General checked her voluble entreaties with a single word. She crimsoned with anger, and tears flashed into her eyes, though she threw back her head with an air of scorn. She was conscious of being in a manner rebuked and put to shame before Basil, and as she again took his arm, which she had relinquished at the moment of her appeal to her father, she muttered a veiled protest against being always watched and treated like a child. Basil seemed not to hear, and did not speak in reply; and recovering

herself with leisurely, lofty grace, she moved down the stairs, across the hall, and to the open door where the carriage waited, and two thick ranks of humble, patient gazers waited also to see the company go.

In the rear of the rank to the right of the door-way stood the miserable Turtell, his broken arm in splints, and his lean visage cadaverous under the dim lamplight. He had been hardly prevailed on not to attend the ball, and when convinced that admission would certainly be denied him, he had stationed himself in the Market Place to watch Emmot come and go. A glimpse was all he had of her at arriving, but now, for some reason, there was a minute's halt on the inn step, and he had a full view of her resplendent beauty. Suddenly he caught her blazing eyes, and for a second fixed them. But she was too excited to remember her dread of him, and some evil spirit possessed her to turn from him with repulsion, and to Basil with an air of tender confidence, and point him out in the throng. Basil did not so much as look his way,

or he would have seen Turtell, mad with rage and jealousy, trying to force a passage to the front of the crowd—trying, fortunately in vain, against others as eager to see as himself, and more able to hold their places.

The General led his wife to the carriage, and Basil followed with Emmot, and put her in. The door was shut, and he was bowing his good-nights, as the coachman touched his horses and drove off, when a rough voice, close behind him, exclaimed, “Hold the barber, hold him! he’s gotten a knife, the villain!” and immediately there was a scuffle, and the wretched Turtell lay struggling on the ground in the grip of three men—arrested within an ace of the execution of his deadly purpose.

There was the gay rattle of a gallop in the ball-room overhead, but the rumour of something terrible passing in the street below brought several gentlemen downstairs—Colonel Godfrey, who heard his nephew’s name in it, amongst them.

“My dear boy, they say you are hurt!” cried

he, seizing both Basil's hands, who advanced to calm him.

"I am not touched—it is much ado about nothing," said Basil.

"It might have been something, though!" exclaimed the landlord, exhibiting the weapon which had been wrested from Turtell; and even Basil could not repress a shudder as its polished brightness was presented to him, and he recollected the sudden death of the watch-dog at the Manor.

Turtell gnashed his teeth in impotent fury; disarmed, his broken limb displaced, his frame convulsed with pain and rage, he was a spectacle for pity rather than revenge. He was conveyed to a private room, and the police mounted guard upon him, while Dr. Rigden and another surgeon, under great difficulties, re-did their undone work.

Meanwhile, a judicious steward of the ball suggested to the disturbed gentlemen that as no accident had really occurred, they had better go upstairs again, lest the ladies should take alarm, and the pleasantness of the evening's entertain-

ment be destroyed. Upstairs, therefore, they went, and back through the supper-room by ones, and twos, and threes ; and not a score of persons present knew until the morrow what a misadventure might have happened to the blue candidate but for the clutch of a stout stable-man on the collar of the orange barber ; and then, indeed, all Standen was open-mouthed with gossip, and marvels, and lies.

CHAPTER LV.

PROVINCIAL GOSSIP.

THE magistrates sat that morning, and made very little difficulty as to what must be done with Turtell. Common fame had long pronounced him mad, and his evident intention of the night before was that of a dangerous madman. Two medical men who were consulted, hummed and hawed a little, and talked of delusions that sometimes were no delusions, unreal as they sounded, but they could not deny that the barber was unsafe at present, and the result was his committal to the nearest lunatic asylum. Everybody breathed more freely when he was out of the town; as for him, he was raving, and no mistake about it, when the police gave him over to his keepers.

Basil Godfrey, his uncle and General Vyvian

were present at the examination before the bench, and Basil had the pleasure of hearing Turtell curse him by all his gods as his successful rival in Emmot's favour. He had the opportunity of as publicly denying it, but a sentiment of delicacy for her tied his tongue ; and according to the old adage, his silence was understood by the gossips to signify consent. In vain his friends who loved him pooh-pooched it. Before night a complete popular romance was invented for the pair. Emmot was proclaimed in lanes and alleys as a heroine who had saved her lover's life at the peril of her own, by interposing her body between his and the blow of the would-be assassin. Mrs. Gage took up her parable to this effect to her neighbour over the way, and a belief gained ground that Emmot had received a wound. As the young lady was not visible abroad that day, riding and walking as usual, the fiction was not disproved, and it was so pretty a fiction that numbers of people were quite pleased with themselves for accepting it as a fact, even when Emmot's blooming re-appearance in the Market

Place next morning gave it a palpable contradiction.

Colonel Godfrey was profoundly annoyed for his nephew. He was sensitive to the ridicule of the thing, and he was not without his fears. "That savage will be let out of the asylum some day and will come back to his shop," he said as they drove home together in the evening after Turtell's removal. "Not at all a pleasant neighbour for either the Manor or Whinmore under the circumstances."

"He will suffer depletion where he is gone, and will leave his love and jealousy behind him," said Basil coolly.

Basil was not afraid of Turtell, but he was exceedingly provoked against the gossips. A score of times that day had he been congratulated, or inquired of, concerning his escape through Emmot's imaginary self-devotion, and as often had he plucked that feather from her cap by a candid explanation of all the circumstances. Sentimental people did not like this. Mrs. Gage said it was "not pretty" of Mr. Godfrey—"if

Miss Vyvian *would* have saved him, if she'd had the chance, he ought to feel all the same grateful as if she *had* saved him; and sure she'd canvassed for him like a good 'un, that she had, as Turtell's behaviour went to prove.

Lady Marian Wallace spent her afternoon in a round of visits, and everywhere, without allowing it to be seen that she considered the assertion worthy of grave denial, she made it understood that nothing could be further from Mr. Godfrey's ambition than a match with Miss Vyvian.

"I have been working hard for you, Basil," she told him when he and the Colonel came into the drawing-room before dinner. He thanked her, and begged to know in what way. "In putting down false reports. I think General Vyvian should give his daughter change of air for a time.

"They are all going away when the election is over," said the Colonel. He was rather sorry for Emmot. He could see her beauty, but her faults of character had not come under his notice,

nor had his nephew told him any details of her past history. He had told them to no one, in fact. It was enough for Basil that he knew them himself, and was thereby armed against her enchantments.

But sitting this evening with his kinsman over their wine and walnuts, he did tell him somewhat of her, strongly confirmatory of Lady Marian's opinions, which had begun to look to the Colonel like exaggerated prejudice when his first shock of amazement at hearing them was past. Emmot was so wonderfully beautiful that it was natural that other women should hate her, he thought. He was touched by her too obvious partiality for Basil, and felt that if he could not respond to it, he might, as a gentleman, treat her with a tender respect. It was the expression of some such sentiment as this that brought about the revelation of Emmot's Ashleigh adventures.

"And apart from such antecedents," concluded Basil when the tale was told, "it would be hard for me to feel tenderness and respect for a woman of her tastes and inclinations. She is too free

and easy. Her partiality does not flatter me, for I have seen what her partialities are worth. By contrast with the sweet, pure soul I do love, she is repulsive to me. I should be glad never to come in her way again."

This allusion to Joan Abbott brought about an unsatisfactory debate on Basil's engagement. Colonel Godfrey's prejudice was very strong against it, and becoming stronger the more he was assured of his nephew's immovability. He even said in his wrath and mortification that if he could have believed that Basil was in earnest when the thing was originally made known to him, he should not have established him at Whinmore or persuaded him to canvass Standen.

"I supposed it was a pretty vagary—a sentimental caprice that would pass," said the old man. "Your sister doubted your stability—her husband, the parson, was sure it would never be a marriage."

"I cannot help it, sir, if they so misjudged me," replied Basil. He put a restraint on himself, and neither retorted with angry words,

nor quixotically offered to relinquish the benefits conferred on him. He knew his uncle well enough to be sure that the ungenerous speech would be repented of and forgotten before morning.

“You must not expect to bring your peasant-girl home here in my time,” the Colonel went on. “I presume she is armed for indefinite delay, and will not sicken with hope deferred, having such great exaltation to look to in the end.”

“I shall not suffer her to sicken with hope deferred, sir,” said Basil with spirit.

“Ten years hence ought to be quite time enough for you to think of marrying. You will hardly have made two steps in public life before that. Promotion comes very slowly to men without family influence, and you will have none without family connexions—but for this silly boyish entanglement, as heir to Whinmore, you might aspire to the highest. It is the most wanton of sacrifices ! ”

Basil put the subject by, and talked of other

things. The next day he wrote to Joan a pleasant, short letter, full of only pleasant things, and omitting all mention of Standen gossip. To his sister he wrote also with the same omissions, but more at large on his personal affairs, especially as they concerned Joan.

On the Saturday came out, as usual, the *Standen Gazette*, which he was in the habit of despatching to Ashford as an epitome of his public news; but, behold, gossip in full cry in its columns, and Turtell's tragi-comedy written at full length and in the finest language. All that rumour suggested respecting the young squire of Whinmore and a certain fair lady, living not a hundred miles from the Manor, was there set forth so that those who ran might read. The story of Turtell, Spade and the dog was told again. The insane delusions of the barber were treated with italics and large capitals. Speculations as to whether politics or passion or both combined had prompted the radical barber's malice against the conservative candidate were fully indulged in. The scene in the court-house

before the magistrates was reported to the last word of it. Turtell's journey to the asylum and his behaviour on his arrival there were chronicled minutely, and to wind up with a flourish, it was intimated that the torch of Hymen would probably be kindled at Whinmore and the Manor shortly after Christmas.

Basil tore the paper in twain when he had read this ridiculous farrago, and thrust it into the waste-basket, as not worth contradicting formally or raging at privately; but also as not desirable to send to the dear women at Ashford. Emmot, on the contrary, perused it with an agreeable commotion of feeling at first, and kept it by her to peruse again. Mr. Godfrey had not been to the Manor since the ball, now four days past, but that did not surprise her; she knew that he was much engaged from the curt replies that the General gave to her frequent inquiries. The popular tattle of the interval had been purposely kept from her; until she found herself a heroine in the columns of the *Gazette*, she had no inkling of how common her name was in the town's talk.

Her memory of the events of the ball-night was in no degree confused; she had heard a hubbub as the carriage drove from the inn door, but she had not troubled herself to learn the cause of it, and a charge had been laid upon Jukes not to inform her. She was perfectly clear, however, as to the fact that she had done nothing heroic for Mr. Godfrey—she only wished that the opportunity had been vouchsafed to her.

“I should adore suffering for him!” cried she vehemently when she had read the eloquent fiction aloud to her maid, who had already assisted at the discussion of it in the servants’ hall.

Jukes pouted a judicious lip and replied: “I’ve said it once, Miss, and I say it again—It’s beneath a lady to go on caring for a gentleman that cares nothing for her.”

“Lady or common woman we are all alike—we love or we let it alone as love wills and not as we will,” said Emmot. “There’s a fate in it! Other men have loved me and not been able to move me any more than if I were cold clay;

and now, for my retribution, I love him, and he is stone to me. He does not see that I am beautiful—he minds me no more than a wrinkled hag. If there were charms to buy and philters such as I've read of, I'd buy a thousand, but I would have my way!"

"But maids and men pledged their souls to the devil to get them," rejoined the Abigail gravely.

"If they did, it was worth while, and no more than I would do!" cried Emmot, with defiant recklessness.

"Hush, Miss, don't talk like that—it makes one shudder to hear you," pleaded the maid, whimpering.

"If he cared for me ever so little, I could keep straight, but he never will. I know who has his heart, and that she is good. It is not all my fault if I am bad by nature—there's somebody else to blame besides me. But it does not matter—nothing matters! It will be all the same a hundred years hence whether he loves her or me—the worms will have us both."

“Dear Miss, don’t you believe your Bible?” said Jukes, who was scared by this new mood of her mistress, which she did not understand. “If that’s true, it won’t be all the same a hundred years hence with all of us.”

“Don’t preach me one of your sermons—I know beforehand everything you can say,” interrupted Emmot. “My poor aunt wearied me to death with line upon line and precept upon precept. When I was little and sang with the children in the village choir, I was told I had a voice like an angel. I know a hundred psalms and all the chapel tunes too. I am none the better for them now—I only see the way I shall go in the dark, and am the more miserable that I can’t help it.

“But you can help it if you will, Miss,” recommenced Jukes in her pathetic voice.

“But I don’t want to help it! No one cares for me, and I don’t care for myself; I don’t care what becomes of me! How dare they speak of me and Mr. Godfrey in that wretched little print? They talk as if he loved me, and I am a despised naught in his eyes! I wonder whether I should

have been fond of my mother if she'd lived? I don't suppose I should; she was a poor silly thing, best out of this lying, miserable world! I wish she had died before ever she brought me into it, and others wish it too, for I have never done any good, nor ever shall. I believe I am one of those born to be lost, as I've heard my poor aunt and the methodists talk!"

Jukes uttered an exclamation of horror, and Emmot's excitement ended in a violent hysterical fit of tears, such as had overtaken her rather frequently of late. The maid comforted her with anodynes and cordials and she fell asleep, to wake up cross and pettish against the long-suffering Abigail, when it was time to dress for dinner.

She carried the traces of her emotion to table, and Lady Vyvian remarked in her drowsy way that she did not look well. "No," said the General brusquely, "Standen does not agree with you, Emmot. Our good friend, Mrs. Rigden, is going on a little tour into Wales, and you shall go with her."

Emmot's colour rose and fell and her heart

gave a great bound, but she acquiesced without the slightest hesitation. She knew the significance of her father's tone, and that he only announced what was already arranged. She understood perfectly that she was in somebody's way, and she believed that by his desire she was sent out of it. Her mortification at the moment was so poignant that she felt as if she would be glad not only to leave Standen but the world itself.

Before leaving it, however, she was sufficiently herself again to discharge a parting shaft at Basil Godfrey's true love, by addressing to her the *Gazette* with its budget of provincial gossip,—rightly conjecturing that he would not have sent it himself.

LVI.

ON THE PARSONAGE LAWN.

Two days after the Infirmary Ball Joan Abbott received a cursory account of it from Basil Godfrey. She looked for the *Standen Gazette* on the following Monday, and was disappointed that it did not come. She had learnt to take great interest in its local news, and she was sure from its usual style and practice that the Infirmary Ball would fill a column or two with details that Basil had not leisure to give. Perhaps he had sent it to his sister—in the afternoon she would go up to the Parsonage and see.

Joan was now well used to the ways of the Franklyn household, and would have been welcome there much more frequently had she chosen to go. The rector admired her, though his man-

ner was either formal or bantering always, but his wife loved her sincerely ; and Joan being vividly alive to both their feelings, preferred to time her visits when she knew the rector was from home. On this occasion he and Mr. Paget were gone to a clerical meeting at Whorlstone, and she found Mrs. Franklyn seated at work in a shady part of the garden, with Olive lying at length on the grass over a story-book, and Mervyn building a castle of toy bricks. The children ran to kiss "Aunt Joan" as they had been taught to call her, and Mrs. Franklyn said : "Have you brought your sewing—have you come to stay an hour with me ? That is a dear girl ! Olive, give Aunt Joan her pet chair."

The pet chair, a low beehive thing of straw, was brought out, and set down in the shade by Mrs. Franklyn's, and then Olive carried her book out of hearing of their talk which would spoil the wondrous legend she was pondering. Mervyn and his castles vanished too, and when they were alone, Joan immediately asked if Mrs. Franklyn had received the newspaper from her

brother. "He tells me about the ball, but not much, and I want to know *everything*. How I should like to be in the midst of all that is going on just now!" added she wistfully.

"Should you, Joan?" said Mrs. Franklyn with a faint tinge of surprise in her voice. "I am quite content to do no more than hear about it—I have had a letter from Basil too, and I think he will be glad when it is over." She spoke rather negligently, as she had never done before about his affairs. Since her child's death, her sprightliness was much subdued, but Joan fancied there must be a present cause for her philosophical indifference.

"Has anything happened to destroy your interest in the election? Basil writes to me as usual," she said.

"I'll show you his letter—but perhaps I had better not! He would have told you himself if he had wanted you to know."

"As you think best," replied Joan very quietly, but her countenance fell, that had been so bright.

“There, read it! I should have held my peace—I don’t know what I should have done!” said Mrs. Franklyn hurriedly, and taking a letter from her work-basket, she dropt it on Joan’s lap.

Joan left it untouched for some time, and sat silent, her deep, grave eyes fixed on the distant hills, which lay pale and faint in the afternoon harvest glow. Little Olive, who had finished her story, and wanted leave to engage in some other play, came dancing over the lawn, but seeing her mother and Joan still, and, as it were, sad, she was still too, and stood leaning against Joan with an arm round her neck caressingly. At last she said: “What are you looking at, Aunt Joan, such a long way off?”

Joan drew her thoughts home with a sigh, and said: “I cannot tell you, Olive—it is all in a haze and a maze.” And then she opened Basil’s letter to his sister. It was much longer than his last to her—that had been rather brief and hasty.

Mrs. Franklyn watched her as she read, willing

to learn from her tell-tale face what perhaps her lips would not utter. Several times in the course of her perusal, Joan lifted her eyes to the hills, and lost herself again in reverie. Basil wrote to his old confidante more openly than he had ever done since Joan Abbott took the first place in his heart. He began with allusions to the difficulties of his course at Whinmore—desirous to obey his generous kinsman, and bound in love and honour to resist him. Then he went on to detail Lady Marian Wallace's conversation with himself on his engagement, and the substance and result of her mediation with his uncle. The letter was evidently not intended for Joan's study, and ought not to have been shown to her; for he did not retrench any the plainest expressions of opinion and disapprobation.

Once Joan said with scorn on her lip: "I, too, have seen palaces," and at the broad reference to her humble origin she blushed hotly, and cried: "I never served any one but for love yet, nor did my mother!"

“It is but a word—never mind it!” said Mrs. Franklyn, and laid a kind hand on one of hers.

Colonel Godfrey's proposal to give up to his nephew a house and farm in Hampshire, and that he should give up ambition, brought Joan to a longer pause, but with kindling face she spoke at last. “I should be afraid,” she said, “but that I know Basil is not curst with ‘the vain admiration of anything, which is the root of all weakness.’ Once I declared that I would never be his wife to his hindrance, but he made me feel that it was unworthy to imagine that he would prefer such fortune as he has before him to me and his honour untarnished. No doubt ‘under a compelling occasion he would let me die, but it were a pity to throw me away for nothing; if it were between me and a great cause, I should desire to be esteemed nothing,’ but there is no great cause in peril here. Two wise men have suited my mind with words—if they are frank, that is frank too. I shall never be a martyr by my free choice—

I love Basil far too well now, lightly to bid him go."

Mrs. Franklyn did not answer—she wished the letter safe back and secret in her basket. Joan resumed her reading. Presently a little flush rose on her brow, and spread and spread, and deepened, with the quivering of every nerve, to her throat, to her finger-tips. Then there was a glittering under her dark, curled lashes, and the next moment, the beautiful eyes opened full of tears on her companion's face, and her lips broke into a rapid, trembling remonstrance. "Not to marry for ten years! What folly is this? If he were a poor man and struggling, I would wait as long as he pleased, but Basil is not poor—he was rich, by me, with the least he ever had, and now every step carries him further away from me. If he cannot come for me soon, while I have this little treasure of beauty that they cry up so much, will he come for me late, when it is half spent? I *know* he will not."

"My dear, if Basil were in my place now,

he would say ten years is nonsense," whispered Mrs. Franklyn gently.

"If I could believe that he loves me so poorly—with such a measure of patience, I would go away with my cousin Nicholas when he goes to America!" cried Joan passionately; and then came the rain! Ten years! it was more than half as long as she had lived! As well fix doomsday for their wedding-day as talk of ten years!

The serene wife, happy in accustomed possession of husband and children, was heartily frightened at the unwitting mischief she had done. She told Joan she must not talk so wildly, so madly, she must think and respect herself. Nothing but harm was ever done by violence, and she would be ashamed of it by-and-by.

That was a safe prediction—her sudden anger over, Joan was mortally ashamed. "I promised Basil never to distrust him, and I will not," she said as the swell after the storm was subsiding. "You are not to tell him—let me do

my own confessing, and I shall be sure of absolution."

"Tell him your threat about your Cousin Nicholas? No—I should not dare."

Joan opened wider her softened eyes. "I meant no threat as against Basil. If we two had to part I would put half the world between us, and try to suffer as little as I might. Nicholas has heard news of an elder brother of his father and my mother who is settled in the far west of Canada, and he has determined to join them there. Rather than wear out my life by myself, in the little frets and cares of this conventional world, I would go and forget it too in a freer being amongst the wild hunters and trappers. The sun shines and God is there as well as here; and Nicholas would be good to me—he always was."

"I have no doubt," said Mrs. Franklyn drily. "He desires no better, I am sure, than that you should be his wife."

Joan almost stamped with impatience: "You will not understand me! Did I talk of being his wife?"

“It would be very hard on him to have to be good to you if you were not. Don’t be foolish, Joan—I wish I had not let you read that letter, but I was perplexed what to do. The fact is, Basil does not see enough of you. *We* can live and love on very little, but absence does not make the masculine heart grow fonder. The sight of your face would refresh his feelings. If he had talked to you last week, he would not quote Colonel Godfrey’s advice as to waiting ten years—he would fume and rage at it, and blow it away with a blast.”

“I know he loves me when he is with me,” said Joan, all her sweetness returning. “If he will but be true to his own strength, he may break through his difficulties like cobwebs, and need throw neither his ambition nor me away. He would have no peace of mind or conscience for many a day if he used me unkindly. And as for me—I might turn into a wild woman of the woods, but it would be because I had lost the desire of life.”

“You see from Basil’s letter that we may

expect Colonel Godfrey here one of these days—would you have liked to go to Whinmore if he had consented?” Mrs. Franklyn asked.

“I should not have feared to go—he says I should look and feel out of place there. At Rome we had many friends, gentlepeople, and I do not remember feeling out of place amongst them, or that they ever slighted me. Perhaps I liked the artists and book-men most; there was one old sculptor with whom I was excellent friends, and princes and nobles were friends with him. The only people I feel quite lost amongst are those made of money and nothing but money. Since I have seen Rome, present pomps and vanities appear small to me, and only Nature great. I think, with Basil at hand, I could support the magnificence of Whinmore. If Colonel Godfrey comes to the crow’s-nest, we will receive him with our best grace, and I will endeavour to measure him without his stilts—he is not tall without them, I’m sure.”

“You are quizzing, Joan—”

“I cannot help it—Mr. Paget has trained my

mind that way, lest my promotion by Basil's favour should turn my head."

"I am afraid Mr. Paget has developed a germ of sarcasm in you, and that is a dangerous growth."

"Sarcasm does not flourish in warm dry climates, and in cold damp climates it is a precious tonic. If I live in Basil's sunshine it will never grow rank—if I go to the backwoods I shall need all the bitter roots of philosophy my good master has provided me with. Of course, I would rather eat the sweet corn and ripe fruit of home culture, and have a field and husbandman of my own, but if I am not to have them, perhaps it is well that I should be furnished with a moral chaff-cutter to cut up my husks. Mr. Paget is satisfied that he has taught me a proverb, an axiom, or a reflection for every sorrowful occasion that can crop up in life, but I should like experience to strike me out a few live bright sparks from my own anvil."

"Don't talk to me in metaphors, Joan—do you try Basil so?"

“No—but I might if he left me to cultivate my mind for ten years while my beauty is waning. I should be fit for a doctor’s degree at the end of that time, and spoilt for a pleasant wife.”

Mrs. Franklyn laughed. “I don’t believe you will be spoilt, but I will warn Basil,” said she.

“Tell him if we are to wait ten years, I might as well go to the backwoods, meanwhile, and when they are over he could come and fetch me. I don’t think the backwoods are more than ten thousand miles off.”

“I will tell him just that. What a fury you were in half an hour ago, and now you are laughing at him!”

“I should not laugh but that I have faith in him. It is nearly three years that I have been learning that lesson, and I have got it perfect—if it turned out false lines, I should never believe in anything again.”

“Except your proverbs, axioms, and reflections.”

“Nay, I should be ready to deny Solomon himself, and to say, that if many waters cannot quench love, nor floods drown it, houses and lands can press it to death.”

“How profane you lovers are !”

“Profane? I trust the wisdom of Solomon to the last shred of it! If Colonel Godfrey were to offer Basil all his substance to forego his love, it would be utterly contemned—I am sure it would !”

“If offered in that barefaced way—but temptations go about masked and variously disguised.”

“The devil is not always strongest. I will be quiet—I will wait for heart-ache till Basil gives it me with his own hand. That letter was not for me; take it,—I will read no more of your letters—mine are loving little good letters, and much better. I have beautiful visions and dreams after them.”

“What of?” said Mrs. Franklyn. “Do you see any now?”

“Yes, the air is full of them. Do you know the legend about the succession to Whinmore?”

Of course you do. Basil has told it to me—I hope it is not true—think if all our boys should die!”

“That *is* discounting the future, Joan!” exclaimed Mrs. Franklyn with a soft peal of laughter. “‘Think if all our boys should die.’ I wish Basil had heard that solemn speech, and that he could see you blushing for it.”

“I am not blushing,” asseverated Joan with a face the colour of a red, red, rose. “Why should I blush? I don’t believe in legends and curses, and I shall pray, and pray, and pray for blessings—”

“On ‘our boys,’” interrupted Mrs. Franklyn gaily. Then dropping into her more serious vein, she bent her face to Joan’s and kissed her, saying: “Be sure, prayers are never lost—here comes *my* boy.”

Mervyn came to call them in to tea.

LVII.

ON THE CATTLE-BRIDGE ALONE.

WHEN Joan left the Parsonage she did not go home at once; she strayed down the water-meads to the cattle-bridge, and there went through a private rehearsal of the changeable mood she had exhibited to Mrs. Franklyn. Her mind was a tangled skein of thoughts, of which one thread only ran straight:—whatever Basil's vexations, perplexities, difficulties, she was quite sure that he loved her, and none but her.

“I wish fortune would use him a little ill, to bring us nearer of a level!” she whispered to the listening air. She did not dare even in her secret imagination to consider whether it would be

well for him to give her up—she recollected too perfectly that scene of his anger when he had made her weep for shame that she had conceived it possible. As for his kinsman's counsel of ten years' delay, that was a jest, *must* be a jest. Why, she would be as old—as old as the hills in ten years' time! Was it credible that two lovers had ever set their faces to a goal so distant? They might, perhaps, wear away with the wearing years if they were very poor-hearted and weak; but could two in the flush of youth, with strong arms, warm affections, and good courage, let their sap of life so waste with waiting? She did not believe it—if it were true, they could be no true lovers that denied God's providence so, to serve false gods of the world!

The evening was very sweet and still—such a sweet still evening as those when Basil had twice come to her there—she wished he could come now! She did not let any of his words in his letter to his sister trouble her, but some words of Mrs. Franklyn stuck in her memory like a thorn—"You do not see

enough of each other." And how to help it? She had never realized any proof of the fact until it was put into plain speech, but she knew clearly the moment it was expressed that Basil did tire with absence. His letters became less frequent and less full when he had not seen her for long, though she felt no want of kindness in them. If they had parted but a little while ago, most of what he had written to his sister he would have written to her.

Her gaze settled on the banked-up sunset clouds "a long way off," as little Olive said, and a dreamy melancholy came over her. Trust? Yes, she trusted. Hope? Yes, she hoped. But there were many things against her. Whatever happened she would never blame Basil, never, never, *never*. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera. That Jael, Fortune, had driven a nail into many a head since his, and into many a heart too. She must bide her fate with patience.

She fell to thinking of the days when she and Basil first met—the days when her father

and mother were alive. They seemed somehow very long ago. From the child she was then, she had become a woman, and had quite put away childish things. Her experiences multiplied fast. Twice she had seen death—twice she had seen the dust of her dearly beloved given to the dust. She began to realize of the world, as a place where change trode on the heels of change, where familiar faces vanished often from the scene, and new figures came as swiftly to play their hour upon the stage. Hardly were her two graves green in the churchyard when her cousin Nicholas came to her one day at the organ, and told her how he was planning to leave the forge and the village, and to seek him a home in another country. Joan said she should miss him, and Nicholas never spoke. He was not gone yet. It seemed that he found it hard to say his last good-byes.

Also at the crow's-nest a fresh interest was growing apparent. Not many guests came there. Young Mr. Gerrard Spencer, eccentric and moody, was the most frequent visitor—an almost weekly

visitor—but Joan had heard several times lately the name of a lady, Miss Alice Rotherham, and she posted letters to her which Mrs. Paget wrote, and did not talk about. The blind curate and his mother had made her acquaintance at Geneva during those winter months when Joan was at home and absent from them, and there was some expectation of her coming to Ashford soon on a visit. Joan heard her spoken of as a very pretty musician and sweet singer; she was accomplished besides, and cheerful and good-humoured. Mr. Paget always brightened perceptibly when she was the subject of conversation, and her letters were hoarded in his desk. It was not necessary to be a witch to see what this meant. A time was evidently approaching when Joan would be no longer indispensable at the crow's-nest. She ought to have been unfeignedly glad that it was so; but this evening, alone on the cattle-bridge, her prevision of the change gave an additional sadness to her melancholy.

It would not have been so, perhaps, but for

the gulf that seemed to be widening between her and Basil.

One by one all she loved were passing away or taking to themselves nearer and dearer companions. If Basil did not hold by her—if she lost Basil, what was there left to her in the world to call her own? There was her little godson, but him a rosy-cheeked ripe apple would beguile to anybody's lap and kisses at any moment. He was fond of her in his selfish baby way, and that was all.

“Oh! Basil, be true to me, be true to me!” she cried in her heart with fervour of supplication. “Be true to me, my love, my only love!” And then she wept—as women will weep sometimes for fancied sorrows that may come.

But the sun returned after the rain as in the afternoon. Basil could not be faithless to her and faithful to himself. A man acts according to his character, and he was good, kind, pitiful, generous. If he imagined her in any distress, he would be there, with her at once. How

tenderly had he cared for her in that long journey home to her father ; how promptly had he flown to her comfort when he learnt her mother's death ! It would not be like him to forget one who confided in him as she did—whose universe he was. He had others to consider besides her, but she would be first. His way was more difficult to steer than formerly, but he would steer it straight. He was entering into the throng and heat of life, but he would remember her who waited apart in peaceful shade, and would come home to her to rest at last.

The river ran with silent current, the sunset clouds were lost in gloom, the willows rose black against the sky, when Joan strayed home by the old path through the school-house garden. The door was shut, but the wide lattice of the house-place glowed with warm radiance, and she saw, as she passed, the head of the new master bending between it and the lamps in her father's place over a book, and his young wife standing on the hearth with her baby in her arms as her

own mother must have stood a thousand times with her.

So wears the world away with change, and change, and change!

LVIII.

STANDEN NEWS AT ASHFORD.

IMAGINARY woes are always sufferable, always sentimental. Real woes have mostly an element of the grotesque, the mean, the vexatious. Joan Abbott had gone to rest last night, if not in perfect peace, at all events, in that soft, sweet mood that follows on fears allayed, hopes convinced, and humble prayers. She rose with a light heart too. The morning was delicious. She set her little window open under the eaves, and looked out on the green hill rising to the church. The post-mistress was coming down the steep path with her leather bag on her arm, and a sheaf of letters in her hand. Joan looked for no news to-day, and got to her Bible and

devotions untroubled by expectation. But as the old woman came in at the gate, she saw her, and held up a letter and paper.

“There is the Gazette at last!” said Joan aloud, and ran downstairs to receive them.

The address of the newspaper was not in Basil’s hand, and the letter had a strange face too—a foreign look. She opened it first, and, glancing at the signature, perceived that it was from Mam’selle Verger, the Swiss lady who had been her escort home last year, and to whom she had once written since, without receiving any answer.

“That will wait,” thought she, and laying it aside, opened the Standen news, eager to see what it had to say of the election, and the ball, and her beloved’s share in them.

She was not long in finding the account of the ball, for the sender of the paper had taken the pains to draw a heavy ink stroke down it, and to mark with big black crosses several other paragraphs of kindred interest. Joan had not read a score of lines before she knew why Basil

had not despatched the paper. There was the complete story and gossip of Standen for her. She read the whole without lifting her eyes from the print, and then with a long gasping breath stood up on her feet as if to confront a visible adversary. She walked once or twice through the narrow compass of the room, and caught a glimpse of her face in the glass—white, contracted, quivering full of pain, amazement, and angry distress.

“He was not hurt—that is a consolation,” said she, and threw the paper from her with contempt.

It was some time before she recovered sufficiently to remember her letter, but at length she took it up and perused it. It was a sort of pathetic echo of the newspaper story, written by the Swiss lady from Castle Harbinger to moralise on the fickleness of men, and to condole with her lovely young friend on the loss of her adorable lover. My Lady Crosfel, to whose dear only daughter she had the honour of being instructress, had brought from Whinmore certain

intelligence that it had crisped her nerves to hear. She doubted it, she shed tears, she was convinced. She approached with all delicacy to offer her regrets, to assure her young friend of her profound sympathy—and so forth through three closely-written pages of silver paper.

This letter did Joan good—it made her laugh though there were tears in her eyes; it made her fly to Basil's last epistle for an antidote against the poison of suspicion. The roses came back to her cheeks, the calm to her countenance, and when she carried the "Standen Gazette" to the parlour at breakfast time, she announced it as containing wonderful news that would astonish her godmother. It did astonish her, but it made her angry too. It was not worth being angry at, Joan said; and she read out the most eloquent and remarkable passages for Mr. Paget's edification. But he was not so much edified as she would have liked—was rather inclined to his mother's views. He spoke of Emmot as "that pestilent woman," and hoped Mr. Godfrey had given a prompt and decisive

denial to what was asserted of him. Joan's sense of insecurity returned. She was annoyed, uncomfortable, restless all the morning, and was yet ashamed that she could be so moved by the ridiculous—for she felt it ridiculous to fear that her Basil, manly, high-minded, could be led away by so vulgar a syren.

The "Gazette" was sent up to the parsonage by the hand of a chance comer soon after breakfast, and Mrs. Franklyn studied it with a gusty wrath that amused the rector. He said, of course, it was all nonsense; but her vocabulary contained no words strong enough to express her sentiments—nothing would express them or relieve them, but tearing up the paper into very little bits. "Basil did not send it—I have no doubt that abominable woman sent it herself," cried she, with vehemence. Fear for her brother was at the root of her rage—he was so facile, so ready to fall into captivity to a fair face!

At the earliest moment she could hope to see Joan alone, she went down to the crow's-nest, and found her in the garden.

“Take me to your room, that we may not be interrupted while we talk about it,” said she, and they went up to the small chamber garnished with the same poor furniture that had been Joan’s at the school-house—the old chest of drawers, the rocking-chair, the narrow, hard little white pallet, the scarlet-edged book-shelves against the walls, the pot of geranium in flower on the window-sill. Mrs. Franklyn had never entered it before, and she remembered afterwards the impression it had given her of pure simplicity and cool retreat. There were some mementoes of Joan’s travels visible too—a fine engraving of the *Madonna della Sedia*, a bas relief of a beautiful head carved in ivory, yellow, and age-stained, some views of Rome, petrifications, bits of stone, and bits of wood, each with a story to it.

Mrs. Franklyn placed herself in the rocking-chair, and Joan sat down on the side of her bed, confused and startled by the abrupt earnestness of her visitor. “I hope and trust Basil has not been up to his old tricks again,” said

she to begin with. Joan blushed—she was not in the secret of his early vagaries. “If he has been flirting with this most odious woman, he is rightly served for his folly—as for his ever having contemplated marrying her, Joan, you need not fear for a moment there is any truth in that.”

“I am not taking it seriously. I am not afraid of anything,” replied Joan with a rather uncertain voice.

“You don’t know Basil as well as I do, or you would have less confidence.”

“I think I know him well enough to be sure there is no truth in the newspaper tattle as it concerns him and Emmot Torre. I will tell him the “Gazette” has been sent to me by a strange hand, and I will send him also a letter of condolence that I have received from the lady who travelled with us from Geneva last year. She is governess in some great family of his acquaintance, and has heard the news from them.”

Mrs. Franklyn expressed a wish to see the

letter. "And you believe there is nothing in it?" she inquired when she had read it.

Joan hesitated a minute or two, and then said: "I don't believe there is anything in it for which Basil is to blame. You know Miss Seamer? Six months ago she told me that Emmot Torre had conceived a grand caprice for Basil, and had even expressed a resolve to capture him if she could. But I have not been much disquieted—he is well able to take care of himself."

"Oh, my dear, I wish these were the days of fairy godmothers! and that yours would come in her pumpkin coach, turn you into a radiant princess with one touch of her stick, and carry you off to marry the prince out of hand!"

Joan understood the implication perfectly. "Basil knew me first as Cinderella," said she rather sadly.

"An exquisite Cinderella," Mrs. Franklyn thought, as she looked at her—her loveableness all her fortune, her youth and purity her flawless jewels. Then she exclaimed of a sudden:

"You are too submissive, Joan, you treat him too kindly. Why don't you try to pique his serene highness into a fear of losing you?"

Joan looked up surprised. "I have none of those arts," said she. "I cannot be anything but myself."

"Are you afraid of losing him?"

"If it were not for love I would owe him nothing!" was Joan's quick reply. "What care I for luxury? It is not heartsease. When he gave me his love, I esteemed it the most precious of gifts—if he does not leave it me of his free-will, he may take all the rest—he has nothing else I value."

"The world is apt to think love by itself but a poor thing," responded Mrs. Franklyn.

"It is all I ever had to give, and Basil was not of the world's opinion when he woo'd mine. Do you think he is beginning to regret our engagement?" said Joan, wistfully.

"I dare not suggest that. I think, perhaps, he is beginning to regret you are not more equal in rank—and that is natural when you are a source

of contention between him and Colonel Godfrey. I don't know what will be the end of it—his letter that you read, puzzled and perplexed me greatly. It does not seem to have disturbed you!”

“I only know how he bade me never, never distrust him—that he told me distrust of him was disloyalty. He wrote to me kindly but the other day. What can I do? If ambition grows above me in his heart, if he discovers that after all I shall match ill with his condition, he may be sure that I will absolve him of his word.”

“Though your own heart break?”

“Hearts do not break so easily. I should have a dull life instead of a happy one, that is all. But there would be no happiness for me, only poignant misery, if he took me for pity's sake and his promise, and I found it out, and found myself a drag on him. Oh, let us leave talking of it!” Joan clasped her hands and wrung them hard together, with a look in her eyes as if she had conjured up a prospect past bearing.

“I have made you wretched—I had better not have come,” cried Mrs. Franklyn. “I wish I could advise you what you ought to do. But I declare, I don’t know. The circumstances are all so out of the common way.” Every word she spoke only deepened Joan’s distress; her assurance that she knew Basil best, her allusion to his “old tricks,” harassed the girl with doubts of her own sagacity. She knew the stock phrases about lover’s vows, but if Basil was not true, then was he false indeed—false of face, of tongue, of everything!

At last she broke out into a low, painful cry. “Let us alone, let us find our way out of the wood by ourselves! Conventionalism is a great mystery to me. According to that creed, I am not a fit wife for Basil only because he is the heir of a long line and rich, and I am of churl’s blood and poor, tho’ as mere man and woman we are much alike, and love each other—for I know he loves me. I am not what the fine world calls a lady, but he has told me I am lady enough for him.”

“Dear Joan, it is not to you personally that any one could take exception,” interposed Mrs. Franklyn.

“I know it is not—it is to the names of things.” Joan spoke these last words with a weary scorn, and rising from her seat on the bed, came and leant against the side of the window, and gazed with that far-away gaze of hers to the most distant point of earth and sky that she could see.

Mrs. Franklyn went away soon after this in a much disturbed mood, and when she opened her mind to the rector, was only admonished of the risks of busybodyism. Joan felt exceedingly depressed after her visit; the more depressed because she knew that Basil’s sister was at heart her friend, and had been the only advocate of their marriage amongst his people. She wrote to him in the evening with devout thanks for his safety, but made no allusion to the rest of the Standen talk; she also changed her mind about sending him the Swiss lady’s letter. She did not believe the gossip about Emmot Torre, she

said to herself; and if she began to write about it, perhaps she should say what were best left unsaid. Basil had a world of work on his hands, and she would not bring him fresh perplexities. By the time she came to her signature, she had almost written away her own. There was balm of Gilead for all griefs in that perfect assurance of his love which she possessed and clung to.

Mrs. Franklyn, however, did not imitate Joan's reticence or her considerateness. She wrote to her brother very much at large, first in comment on what he had written her, and then in repetition of what she had said to Joan and Joan to her—not omitting the proposal of flight to the backwoods. She next treated of the Standen news, but solemnly, as if she stood in immediate dread of Emmot Torre's presentation to her as a sister-in-law—which she did not. Then she mentioned Mam'selle Verger's condolences addressed to Joan, and concluded with an earnest exhortation that Basil would try to know his own mind for a certainty before he presented himself at Ashford any more; giving it as her own opinion

that Joan would release him from his promise, any hour he desired such release, and would not die for him when it was done. And her own counsel was, that if he began to experience doubts of the wisdom of their engagement, it had better be given up without more ado ; she had always had a lurking dread, from her knowledge of his instability, that it would have to be given up, and now she foresaw the end. The rector had foreseen and foretold it from the beginning.

Basil had to read this cheerful, comfortable, delightful letter twice over to get the drift of it into his mind. A fit of fatigue had just then come over him ; he was tiring of his free and independent supporters in Standen, and was tempted sometimes to reflect that great as might be the honour of representing them in Parliament, the charm of his knapsack days before ever he saw them was infinitely greater.

“ Dear heart, dear Joan,” said he with a tender remorse, “ I wish we were going to the backwoods to-morrow, with one carpet-bag between us ! ”

But he went into Standen as he had done yesterday, and was very busy and active with Mr. Cobb and other gentlemen of his committee until evening. His agent had given him notice that he thought the yellows would run them closely when they came to the poll, and Colonel Godfrey was anxious and fidgeted lest his nephew should not come in successful. The possibility of defeat made Basil anxious and fidgety too.

LIX.

“HURRAH FOR THE BONNETS OF BLUE.”

THE last day of the Election at Standen was wet—a steady autumnal storm and down-pour from quite early morning. But the windows within range of the hustings were full of ladies, and the general public was dense in the Market Place at four o'clock, when the Mayor announced from the centre window of The Long Room at the “White Hart,” that Mr. Basil Godfrey was elected by a majority of THREE.

THREE! “A very close shave,” said Mr. Cobb, rubbing his clean hands, while Mrs. Gage, to whom, fixed in the fore-rank of the throng, Basil had handed down his umbrella with superb courtesy, gave way to her Amazonian sentiments of

triumph, and cheered him till her rosy broad face ran down with mingled tears and rain. He made an excellent brief speech of thanks from the hustings, as reported in the Standen Gazette, but only the reporter heard a word of it; and the poor beaten Birmingham man, after a bit of jocularly that quite missed fire, hurried to Mr. Jabez Hughes's private house, to bid his plucky little wife pack up and come away for ever from the scene of their dear double defeat. Never, while he lived, would he enter it again!

He found her in sumptuous attire and bitter distress, and his agent's wife essaying to comfort her.

"Don't cry, love, pray don't cry. What the better would you be if Hoyle *was* in parliament? Take my word for it, while men are men, they'll never let us vote or anything. And what could we do if they did, when, as Hughes says, the hardest of us cries if matters go contrary? My knees shake under me to hear folks angry, and I go as white as this handkerchief. It can't be helped if God made us so. Let men do the hard

work; they're fit for it, and nothing else. I go a long way with your ideas, love, but not so far as women voting and being in parliament. Fancy a Division, and the Minority all in tears! I am sure I should be, if I was beaten on what I had at heart; and look at yourself now, though you have as much spirit in your little body as a dozen big women. Cheer up; here's Hoyle, poor fellow; he's disappointed too, but he's not crying."

No, Mr. Hoyle was certainly not crying, but then, the disappointment was less to him than to his pretty Bessie. He also bade her cheer up, and never mind; and said he should be glad to get home again to the chicks, and to see how business was going on at the office. It was much easier to say than do, however, for pretty Bessie's mortification was as intense as her faith in her cause was genuine. The only consolation for her was that her day would come yet, and perhaps before very long.

Lady Marian Wallace had driven in to Standen after luncheon, accompanied by Lady Crosfel and her daughter Monica, now a pretty slim girl of

thirteen, in a straw hat and blue ribbons. A bow-window had been reserved for them at the "White Hart," and there they sat, and watched the drenched and rushing multitude below, during the last hour before the closing of the poll. Lady Vyvian and the General were ensconced in another window of the same room; and when Lady Marian inquired for Emmot, the General made answer that she was gone with Mrs. Rigden to pay a visit in Wales. No more questions were asked, and her absence grieved no one—even Basil Godfrey forgot in his success how much she had done to promote it, by subduing and bringing in two or three blue voters, and getting rid of the orange barber.

The minutes grew more and more exciting to the ladies as the index of the parish-church clock moved on towards four, and when, at last, the Mayor proclaimed the issue, Goldenhair clapped and vociferated with as loud exultation almost as Mrs. Gage. Lady Crosfel entreated her to moderate her enthusiasm, but Goldenhair was at that happy time of life when one is enthusiastic with-

out shame. She sang “Hurrah for the bonnets of blue!” from beginning to end, and when the fortunate candidate came in a little while after with her father, she formed a mimic fife of her two hands, and marched to meet them, tuning up with swelling cheeks in the triumphant strains of “See the conquering hero comes,” which the blue band was braying in the Market Place outside.

“There will be a genuine politician’s wife some day!” cried Colonel Godfrey, who had followed his nephew into the room, and was laughing like the rest at her lively demonstration.

Goldenhair played on unabashed until she had played herself out of breath, and then she said to Basil: “I wear your colours: you will belong to grandpa’s party—you are coming to Castle Harbinger, are you not?” all which he answered with pleasant acquiescence. He was considering where he had seen the bold elf before. All at once he remembered that it was in the Wood at St. Goar, when she dropt out of the clouds between him and Joan Abbott, lost in love’s young dream. By way of sensible conversation, he told

her she was grown ; to which she replied that, of course, she was—she had nothing else to do but grow, and learn her lessons with Mam'selle Verger.

“Mam'selle Verger,” echoed Basil, seizing his opportunity : “Will you give her a polite message from me? Tell her she made a grand mistake in addressing a dear young friend of mine the other day ; she is not to be lachrymose any more, but jubilant for her—she'll understand.”

“Will she? I don't—but I'll recollect : she is not to be lachrymose, but jubilant ; and she made a grand mistake in addressing a friend of yours t'other day.”

“Precisely—if you learn all your lessons for Mam'selle Verger as well as that, she has a capital little pupil.”

The two struck up a cordial alliance on this basis, and Goldenhair became very communicative. She and mama had come from Castle Harbinger to lunch at Whinmore, and after lunch had come on to Standen with Lady Marian. They were going back to Castle Harbinger with papa straight from “The White Hart”—she wished they were going

back to Whinmore. Papa would be elected for Flaxton soon. Did Mr. Godfrey know that the yellows once chased the blue lawyer to death at Flaxton? They did indeed; she had seen the house where he ran down the area steps, and dropt dead at the bottom—it was a long while ago, but grandpa remembered it. She used to think ‘a liberal’ meant *liberal* in the dictionary, but old Earl de Walton let anybody who liked walk in Askenshaw, and he was a high Tory; and the young earl had shut it up, and set boards about to warn off trespassers, and he was called “an advanced liberal”—she supposed words changed their meaning in time. She had read about the origin of Whigs and Tories in the History of England—Yes, yes, yes, she did like a story-book better, and she was not a little humbug, sham, and pretender—the thing she liked best of all was a nautical romance—Cousin Bruce Tresham was a middy, and told *such* funny yarns; he would perhaps be at Castle Harbinger when Mr. Godfrey was there, for he had got a long leave, and was certainly coming.

Lord Crosfel rescued Basil from the tyrannical chatterbox, to have a few words with him before taking leave; and, late in the evening, the old Colonel got his nephew, at last, to himself as they rode home to Whinmore, and could express his satisfaction, pride and pleasure, in the results of the day.

“Not a very flattering majority, but enough to give piquancy to victory,” said he. “It is a beginning, my boy; you have only to go on, make Standen proud of its member, and you may die in the House.”

“I trust, Sir, my course will be one that you and I can review with satisfaction twenty years hence,” replied Basil. “It lies higher and leads further than any course I looked to run.”

“So it does, so it does. My poor lost boys!” muttered the old bereaved father. They rode on in silence for some minutes after this, then Basil mentioned Lord Crosfel, and the Colonel exclaimed what a lovely child his daughter was.

“Beautiful little audacious thing,” replied Basil; “pity she is not a son!”

The Colonel sighed: “*There* is the sort of alliance you should aspire to,” said he. “An old hereditary family, honourable political traditions.—If Crosfel have no son, that girl’s husband may be raised to the peerage and perpetuate the title, should he be a prominent man with personal influence.”

Basil was dumb—the temptation was no temptation to him in his present mind.

The Colonel went on. “I have heard that political alliances are often arranged as long before as royal marriages. From the day you became my heir, I have thought perhaps that might be brought to bear. Her age would be suitable and her beauty in perfection at the earliest period you ought to settle. A too early marriage cuts a man’s life short.”

Still Basil was unresponsive. His heart and thoughts were filled with a very different person from little Monica. There was no room for her where Joan Abbott reigned, the most lovely and loveable of all women for him. Her idea was the first that had occurred to him when he knew his

election was won—how glad she would be, how cordially would she rejoice in his success! He determined to be the bearer of his own good news, and to reserve all explanations and protestations, *apropos* of his sister's letter and Standen gossip, until he could make them to her in person. Meanwhile the Gazette might convey her his public news, and to the Parsonage also.

“He has not time to write; every moment is swallowed up in business,” said Mrs. Franklyn to Joan, quite misinterpreting his silence, when nearly a week had elapsed without a line to either. “That is the way with men when the world begins to take hold upon them. Mrs. Hubbard says she knows hardly anything of the squire when the House is sitting; and her sister, who is married to a merchant, with a place out of London, vows she never sees her husband by daylight in winter, except on Sundays. Basil was always excessively eager in any new pursuit, and it seems as if he were forgetting us already, tho' he must be sure we are a good deal troubled.”

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“I did not tell him so,” said Joan quietly.

“I did not want to trouble him.”

“You are much too easy, my dear, much too easy for an impulsive man like my brother. You will let him feel so sure of you that it will be almost a temptation to ill-use you. I gave him a famous lecture, and bade him come no more here unless he had made up his mind to you irrevocably—but I did not mean him to take me *quite* at my word.”

Joan coloured, and wished privately that the dear lady would refrain from meddling and lecturing; then said, with some dignity, “I *do* expect Basil to take me at my word. I think of him always with honour as my lord and master that is to be, and I like to have his respect with his love. Indeed, it is here you and I differ about him. You believe he is still vacillating, and may be piqued into firmness; I believe that caprices to pique him would forfeit me his affection.”

“Well, Joan, employ your own tactics. I dare say it is safest to assume that he cannot leave

you; to suggest that he might, would make the way easier to him if he wished."

Joan was one of the least suspicious natures in the world, but at this moment it flashed across her irresistibly that Mrs. Franklyn had some lurking, unjust thoughts of her. Yet, God knew! a more single-hearted love than hers for Basil Godfrey never filled woman's heart! An indignant thrill shot through her; but even on her lips she checked the expression of it, and only said with an enforced gentleness, "We understand each other, Basil and I; we do each other justice if no one else does. I am not afraid that he should discover any subtlety in me when he comes to know me to the core."

"I am quite sure of that, my dear! You have a soul transparent as crystal!" cried Mrs. Franklyn; but, her protest or *amende* notwithstanding, Joan vowed a vow to herself that she would henceforth have no confidante of her love but her lover himself.

Basil had already, on the reading of his sister's last letter, arrived at the same wise determination.

LX.

THE CONQUERING HERO.

WHEN Basil Godfrey returned to Whinmore from Castle Harbinger, he had a few days with the partridges, and then the Colonel proposed that he should be his companion in a run abroad, by way of rest from their labours. The old man was so generous, so kind, that Basil could not deny him, but he intimated that he must make a short visit to Ashford first. Colonel Godfrey appeared excessively chagrined.

“ I understood Lady Marian that you proposed to go too. Might we not as well go together? The Parsonage can lodge us both,” said Basil courageously.

His kinsman loved him none the less for not being afraid of him, though his reply sounded

brusque and angry: "I am not going to Ashford, Sir, I have changed my mind; if you want to go to Ashford, you can go by yourself."

Basil answered as if it had been all smoothness: "And I will rejoin you here or in town, as you may prefer."

So it came to pass one hushed afternoon, when Joan Abbott was sitting alone in the shady orchard-garden behind the crow's-nest, with some beautiful greenhouse flowers in her lap, which she was making into a bouquet, Basil Godfrey came round by the end of the house, and caught her without warning. She had not been *very* unhappy in the interim, but she had been unsettled, in spite of her resolute faith; and, taken thus unawares in the midst of a pathetic reverie, the feeling of the moment was overwhelming. She stood up, letting the flowers fall upon the grass unheeded, and her "Oh, Basil!" was very tremulous and low.

"What is it, my own darling?" said he, who had expected a joyful greeting; but, for the life of her, she could not speak.

He was hurt, for he saw what it meant—she had again been imagining sacrifice, self-devotion, patient suffering, for herself; and for him, ever-swelling prosperity, and unfaithfulness, by some other name. She could neither conceal the tenor of her meditations at all, nor express it at all, and he was silent too.

“I have come at a wrong moment,” said he, at length. She was still tongue-tied, but she put her two hands on his shoulders, and looked up at him with the loveliest penitent eyes in the world. “I see we shall have to go to the backwoods together,” said Basil. It was nonsense, but good enough sense for the occasion. When he rallied her afterwards on being able to do what she pleased with him, Joan gaily responded, “It is not I, but Love—that little go-between, the best of peacemakers !”

Mrs. Paget, looking out of her window, presently espied the pair seated on the grass, and the bouquet still unmade. They were talking at their ease and leisure about themselves, the election, the ball, a very little about Emmot Torre, about

the future, and about the present. How delightful it was to be together again ! how long had been their separation ! how soon they must separate again !

“ But not for ten years, Joan ; by no means for ten years,” said Basil, emphatically ; and then she knew that his sister had told him all that had passed on the Parsonage lawn, and she turned aside with not a little confusion of face.

“ Ten years are more than half my life-time—the end of them seems as far off as the world’s end,” said she, and began to arrange the scattered flowers that lay within her reach. Basil collected and brought the rest to her, asking what they were for.

“ I am invited to dine at The Hurst this evening,” replied Joan, with a merry smile and blush. “ I cannot imagine what for, unless it be that I belong to a conquering hero. I was never invited before, but Mrs. Hubbard came herself only this morning, and would not give me time to devise an excuse. I am making this bouquet to set off my black dress.”

“I wish the Squire would ask me—I wonder whether he has learnt my arrival in his village,” said Basil. “I will go and make it known abroad—a conquering hero is not to be had in the country every day! Is it a grand party?”

“Oh, no! for Mrs. Hubbard said I was not to care about my dress. But my dress is nice enough; I cultivate the pomps and vanities a little, Basil, that I may not seem to have come off a common.”

“There’s no need, my bonny love; you are as sweet as a bunch of wild roses, and what is there sweeter in the finest garden?”

He was pleased to think there was nothing sweeter, but he was not pleased to have his visit presently cut short by Mrs. Paget, to whom Joan’s first invitation to The Hurst was an event as significant almost as his own reappearance at the crow’s-nest. Joan had a tucker, chemi-sette, or some other feminine mystery to construct of tulle for the evening’s wear. She said she could do it out in the garden where she was, but No, replied the old lady, she knew what sort

of doing it would be with Mr. Godfrey to help!—she must go into the parlour and do it. So Basil, on this strong hint, took his reluctant departure, averring that it was too bad to be deprived of her society on the very first day of his return—why had Mrs. Hubbard chosen to-day, of all good days, to ask for her company, who had never asked for it before? Neither Joan nor her godmother could enlighten him, and he went his way up the hill, feeling robbed of a rightful pleasure, and not prepared to find any compensation for it at the Parsonage.

His sister had said to him on his arrival: “I am heartily glad to see you, Basil, but I don’t know whether anybody else will be,” and he had replied that he was ready to take his chance of it. Now that all was pleasant between him and Joan, he was inclined to think that his darling’s faith and peace would never have been ruffled but for Nelly, and to wish for restrictions on their mutual confidence. Musing on means to enforce such restrictions, he almost ran against the Squire near the Forge.

“ You here, Godfrey ! When did you come ? ” cried the old gentleman, offering his hand with vast cordiality. “ Congratulate you with all my soul ; by Jove, I do ! Lady Marian has been telling us what a narrow shave it was between you and Hoyle. Expensive contest, eh ? ”

“ Is Lady Marian Wallace at The Hurst ? ” asked Basil, surprised, yet beginning to see daylight through Joan’s invitation.

“ Yes, she came yesterday, and stays the week. By-the-by, though it is a shame to take you from the parson and his wife so soon, will you dine with us to-night ? The women have some conspiracy afoot about pretty Joan Abbott, and she is coming.”

Basil replied, that he would certainly come ; and forgave the old Squire’s familiar mention of “ pretty Joan Abbott,” for the sake of his evident friendliness. The conspiracy was as evidently her presentation to Lady Marian—he had no fear but that she would pass triumphantly through *that* ordeal. Mr. Franklyn and Nelly gave him up with grumbling good-nature, and

about five minutes before seven, he entered Mrs. Hubbard's drawing-room, and was met by Lady Marian Wallace with the information that she had intended stealing a march upon him ; then she added in a low tone and with expressive emphasis : " I have seen her, and she is charming — *charming !* "

Only the Squire was there besides, and his excellent wife—a short, thick, broad-faced, ruddy lady, in a chiné buff silk dress, low on the bosom and short in the sleeves, its deficiencies partially supplied by a black lace shawl.

" Miss Abbott has been in the conservatory this half-hour with Flowy. I bade her come early, to set her at ease amongst us, you know," whispered the hostess, with many kind significant nods and smiles to Basil ; and then the Squire seized on him, and plunged into election talk, from which there was no deliverance until the venerable butler announced dinner.

" The young ladies are in the garden ; strike the gong, Merryweather. Will you seek them, and bring them in, Mr. Godfrey ? " said Mrs.

Hubbard, well aware she was giving him a pleasant mission.

Basil met them on the terrace—Flowy, a solid young edition of her mother, in white tarlatan, and Joan, lovely and blushing, graceful and tall, in black silk and crape, her boddice cut square like an old picture, and the whiteness of her neck veiled with white puffery of tulle; a string of jet beads, with a cross, was round her slender throat, and a jet arrow confined the coils of her rich, rufflesome hair. Basil had never seen her before made beautiful for company, nor had she seen him in a fine gentleman's evening costume. Each bowed to the other with a little rallying air of compliment, and then Joan said to Flowy: "We have met once before to-day." Flowy laughed and looked shy, giving them to understand that she perfectly comprehended their case.

Nothing could have been more cheerful and lively than the dinner. Joan sat by the Squire, who was a great talker both in and out of the House of Commons; Lady Marian was on his

other hand, and Basil was between her and Mrs. Hubbard, while Flowy was Joan's neighbour on the left. The Squire had a laudable appreciation of beauty, and delighted in an intelligent listener. Lady Marian was too experienced for a recipient of information, so Joan had the benefit of his chief conversation. The others talked trivialities and laughed enough for twenty people; but the Squire talked sense, and Joan quite won his heart by the aptness of her questions and readiness of her replies. She was as light in hand as the best-bred woman in London, he told Basil afterwards, when they were left to their wine and filberts.

“It is no use cultivating a dull woman—you only turn a silent fool into a talking fool,” said he; “but it is worth while to train a woman of wit in sound knowledge, for wisdom is the result. That sweet girl has been well brought up—she has never been from under my wife's eye, I may say, and Paget has been her assiduous tutor—a most honourable and excellent man. You might do better as regards family and

fortune, but you could not do better for everything that is nice in a woman. Why, my dear fellow, she'll save you a private secretary when you come into office! She is up in Cromwell's projects of parliamentary reform; she knows about Pitt, and I believe that she perfectly understood me when I mentioned his system of subsidies during the great war."

Basil laughed heartily: "We have not gone into such profound questions," said he. "If you fall in with my uncle Colonel Godfrey, you must sing me her praises to him. He is too prejudiced to hear them from me."

"Because of her humble birth? That is strange now-a-days—perhaps not so strange tho' in a military man. I suppose the officers in his profession are all gentlemen-born. So many of the leaders in other professions, you know, have risen from the lower ranks. It is quite a noticeable feature in modern society. Look at the Church—it has had bishops, archbishops even, whose connections touch both extremes of society. Amongst scientific men it is the same,

and amongst literary men and artists. The Hubbards are almost as old as the Derbyshire hills; but I don't care how new a man is if he is not a humbug and hollow pretender. And women are more adaptable than men. Show Joan Abbott to Colonel Godfrey, make him talk to her for half an hour, and she will vanquish his prejudices. She is perfectly lovely, and has an admirable young manner—she has enjoyed the best possible education, and is a picture of health. What can a man desire more? I should be thankful if my boy's choice had half her qualities."

George Hubbard's *choice* had, indeed, but few of what the Squire called Joan's *qualities*. She was a pretty, fashionable, gossamer girl, with a permanent invalid for her mother, and a laborious dull peer for her father; and what was most of all obnoxious to Mr. Hubbard, a taint in blood, which developed from generation to generation insane members in the family, or consumptive members, or, as in the present instance, a member notorious for an extravagant

dissoluteness which could not fail to dig him a premature grave. His son was plainly a disappointment to the old man—perhaps he felt it the more keenly at the moment, having Basil before him, good, brave, handsome, popular, fortunate.

In the drawing-room, meanwhile, Joan was submitting, with her best grace, to the patronage of the kind Squire. Flowy was shrewd in her way, and fancied once or twice that the lively spark in Joan's eyes meant merry mockery rather than gratification, and that she had to set a watch on her lips lest she should let slip some light repartee to the heavy commendations lavished on her. Mrs. Hubbard, with the kindest intentions, was bent on showing her off; and Joan made no modest or coy resistance, because she wanted to get it over before Basil appeared. "If she had told me to do my steps, I should have stood up and danced a minuet," she informed him afterwards, as a sign and token of her respectful obedience.

But Mrs. Hubbard did not bid her do her

steps. She made her play on the piano, and praised her good touch and fine taste; and she made her sing, and extolled the clear flute-like sweetness of her voice. And Lady Marian said, kindly:

“My dear, you play and sing well enough for a lady, but *not* well enough for a professional person;” and she told the Squire that the charm of what Joan did, lay in the simplicity with which it was done, and the entire absence of self-consciousness. Lady Marian, indeed, was greatly attracted by her, and found her estimate of Basil Godfrey’s wisdom much increased by her study of the lady of his love.

When the Squire and he entered from the dining-room, Flowy was standing with an arm round Joan’s waist by the piano, the two singing a duet to Lady Marian’s accompaniment. It was a pretty picture in the half-lighted room, and Basil chose to sit down on a remote sofa by Mrs. Hubbard to contemplate it.

Then was brought in tea, and there was some

desultory conversation over photographs—public characters and stereoscopic views ; and Joan amazed good stay-at-home Mrs. Hubbard by her knowledge of who-was-who on the lists of fame, and her recognition of scenes in Rome, which the Squire had brought from his travels, as quite familiar places. She forgot how long the girl had been general reader and companion to a very intelligent scholar, and eyes to a blind man able to train her to the most accurate observation.

Ten o'clock struck by the gilt time-piece on the mantel-shelf. At the instant rose from her seat Mrs. Hubbard, and said : “ Now, Joan Abbott, I must send you home ; I promised not to keep you a minute beyond ten. Merryweather will walk with you.”

Basil Godfrey would walk with her too ; Merryweather, who had the discretion of years and long service, keeping at a respectful distance behind, but always with his charge in view. On the way Basil said, quizzically : “ Well, Joan, you have made your *début* in county society—

the most difficult of any.—What do you think of it ? ”

“ I think people who can read, and write, and ‘ talk about Shakspeare and the musical glasses,’ are all very much alike on first acquaintance, Basil,” replied she, gaily.

“ So they are. It is good-breeding to rub down angles of character, and to keep peculiarities out of sight. In the intimacy of domestic life gentlefolks have the oddities and perversities of temper common to human nature without distinction of rank, and display them with engaging frankness. It is not position gives the refined mind any more than the bright wit. The women seemed to have taken to you, Joan.”

“ Yes, they were all kind ; but, perhaps, I shall feel at a better advantage when no one has a right to patronize me. Mrs. Hubbard could not help extolling me to my face as a prodigy for a schoolmaster’s daughter ; fifty years hence, if we live to meet, she will remind me of my childhood and youth with pleasing anecdotes. I had to give Lady Marian Wallace a

specimen of my accomplishments, and I am sure she found it tiresome."

"Did you give her a specimen of your delicate powers of satire?" inquired Basil, laughing.

"I behaved with beautiful propriety; she will no doubt tell you so," replied Joan in the same vein.

"You are not aware, perhaps, that the Squire considers you a tremendous chatterbox?"

"When I listened so intelligently! With such admirable patience! He talked Hallam's 'Constitutional History' and De Tocqueville's 'Democracy in America.' Surely, he is ungrateful! As he unfolded his views, I thought, Ah, what a good wife I should be for a conversational bore!"

"Is that a prospect held out to me?"

"Oh, no! you never pay me the high compliment of talking sense."

"You wicked, wicked young woman! But I shall have my revenge. I'll be even with you some day for that!"

They were at the garden-gate of the crow's-nest ; and quaking under this terrible denunciation and threat, Joan said, " Good-night ! " to her lover, and ran in-doors.

LXI.

A DRIVE TO CRICKLADE.

THE next morning, while the family at the crow's-nest were at breakfast, a wee note was brought from the parsonage for Joan. Basil Godfrey was going to drive in the pony-carriage to Cricklade, to visit his friend John Seamer, the rector there, and he would like to have Joan's company if she could be spared.

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Paget, and was glad to give her leave to go. Basil would come for her at twelve.

What a delicious drive through the autumnal lanes that was! The Ashford parsonage pony was fat and fond of his ease as Teddy of Clapham memory, and Basil let him take his time without feeling the leisurely progress any strain on his

good-nature and patience. If Cricklade had been fifty miles off instead of five, he would not have found the way tedious or too long. And how happy and lovely Joan looked under the shadow of her black straw hat ! Basil was ready to vow that it was the most becoming of head-gear, though on any other head it would have been sombre, and decidedly ugly.

“It is very pleasant to go jogging along in this quiet Darby and Joan fashion, after all the fuss and bustle of election-time,” said he with an air of serene enjoyment.

“Especially as the fuss and bustle were not wasted,” replied Joan. “You have won and can take your holiday with a zest. I did so long to be in the midst of the stir, and to hear and to see all that went on !”

“Did you, my darling ?” cried Basil, some compunction mingling with his pleasure : he had got into a habit of thinking, that as she lived out of the world, her interest in it could not be very keen. He perceived his mistake. She was not passive—was not satisfied with shadows. “I

should have liked to have you there," he went on, "but I could not invite you to Whinmore. I am not master, or you should be lady to-morrow, Joan!" He had told her so before.

"When will Colonel Godfrey come to Ashford?" she inquired wistfully.

"I cannot tell. I wished him to come with me, but he would not. I am doubtful whether he will come at all now. He is obstinate, and so he will find am I, though he credits me with much irresolution in my obstinacy."

Joan was silent for a few moments. They were so happy together, there was no need to talk continuously to convince each other of it; and then she asked him to tell her again about the fête and the ball and the last day of the poll, and he gave her a multitude of details that brought each scene and the actors in it, vividly before her. She might almost have fancied herself an eye-witness had she been so inclined. More than ever she wished she had been there. When she heard of life and action, she felt that she could enjoy them, and that a little *doing*

would be delightful after so much reading and musing as Ashford gave time for. The black cap of the philosopher, mounted on the bright locks of youth, is the pleasanter wear for a few bells borrowed from folly:—so she thought, and so she said, Basil not gainsaying her.

She heard quite a peal of these jingling bells presently, but not jingling from any sort of wisdom-cap. Basil found more friends than he sought at Cricklade. Aunt Amelia Spencer and the two buxom young women, her daughters, were on a visit to Cousin Lexcey, and the whole family were at croquet on the lawn when he drove in at the rectory gate. At the promising sound of wheels on the gravel, Blanche tript off to peep round the end of the house to see who was coming. She recognized Basil, dropt her mallet, announced loudly to the rest who the visitor was, and rushed to meet him, Belle following close on her heels, and both radiant with exultation.

“You heard we were here. You have come to see us! We were sure you would!” cried they,

and shook hands with warmest cordiality, while John Seamer walked up adjusting his spectacles, and gave him and Joan a good welcome.

“I have come to see you all,” said Basil, and Joan glanced with shy scrutiny at the fresh-faced, very plump, friendly girls who greeted her hero with sisterly familiarity, and at Aunt Amelia who with visage round, rosy and beaming as the full moon, exclaimed: “Ah, Mr. Godfrey, I liked you better in your knapsack-days before you were a great man. I wish you would not become a martyr to duty, nice people are so scarce. How could you find in your heart to go over to the bores?”

Basil laughed, but did not attempt to answer her. He gave up the reins to the gardener, and assisted Joan with much care to alight, Blanche and Belle looking on and wondering where she bought her hat. It was now their turn to observe her, and they used their eyes to some purpose, while Mrs. Seamer effected a general introduction.

“I will tell you how I like her when I have

seen her without her hat," whispered Blanche to Basil confidentially. And, "She does not belong to the butterfly tribe, nor the lily tribe—it is *she* who has perverted you," said Belle in the same tone, and the two sisters with Aunt Amelia, would have quite taken possession of him, as in the halcyon days before his perversion, had not John Seamer, blind to their manœuvres, routed them by taking off Basil himself, while Joan was left to the women folk unsupported.

She knew and liked Mrs. Seamer, but the free-and-easiness of her cousins amazed while it amused her. They began to talk about Basil as such a dear, sociable, pleasant fellow, and what a cruel shame it was that he should have burthens laid upon him, and have to go into Parliament. He used to be so delightfully lazy, so charmingly indolent, they could not imagine how he had ever made up his mind to incur the labour and pains he would find in the House of Commons. What a sacrifice it was! He could dance—Oh how he could dance! and waltz like an-an *angel*, Blanche cried with enthusiasm; and *Nobody* was so capital in

a charade or private theatricals, said her sister. Was Whinmore a very beautiful place? Aunt Amelia inquired. Was he really getting anything equivalent to the free and joyous life he had given up? Joan understood the interrogatory as addressed to her, and said, She had not seen Whinmore, but she believed it was beautiful for its antiquity.

“I don’t like old places—all haunted, cobwebby ruins and castles that one is expected to know the history of I utterly abhor,” remarked Aunt Amelia. “I once went up into the crypt’ of a cathedral abroad, but nobody will ever catch me doing it again.”

“I should think you went *down* into a crypt, mama,” said Blanche, who had no scruples about correcting the occasional *malapropisms* into which her mother fell.

“Up or down, my dear, it is all the same; it was very dark and close, I remember that.”

The young ladies continued their lament over Basil’s perversion; and at last Belle said to Joan

aside: "Don't let him be too serious—don't spoil him with too much work."

Joan blushed, but put in no disclaimer of her influence. She smiled and said: "I think he had begun to tire of lotus-eating before he knew me."

"Lotus-eating! Was he ever so eccentric as that? I never heard of his being a vegetarian before," exclaimed Aunt Amelia; at which Belle and Blanche laughed merrily and cried, it was no use talking poetry to mama—she could not bear poetry any more than historical ruins or castles.

"Don't let your daughter be brought up to be cleverer than yourself, Lexcey—see what comes of the advantages my girls have had—they make fun of their mother," said Aunt Amelia, addressing herself with most perfect good-humour to her niece, whose first blessed baby was a little girl.

Belle and Blanche would have liked to continue their interrupted game at croquet, but the gentlemen did not re-appear. John had secured Basil in the privacy of his study, and kept him there

until they were for the third time summoned to luncheon. In the meanwhile Joan's black hat had been laid aside, and the two girls who called themselves Mr. Godfrey's old flames, had learnt her figure and features, the colour of her hair and eyes, the tone of her voice, and the tone of her laughter, by heart; and being free from envy and ill-nature, they admired her with the frankest admiration: the only drawback to her perfection being, that she was rather too *high* for them—too much of the quiet gentlewoman.

John Seamer was one of those men who never talk nonsense if they know it, and his daily conversation was so grave a trial to Aunt Amelia that only that very morning she had proposed to her daughters to get a recal from papa to shorten their visit.

But this glimpse of Basil Godfrey revived her jaded spirit, and she began at once to devise schemes for the promotion of amusement, as her vocation in life was. But alas! for their success. Cricklade was not a genial soil for amusements, and John Seamer and his wife were far too busy

in their house and parish to have time for the pursuit of any pleasures not to be found within their limits. And besides, Aunt Amelia's amusements did not amuse them; they had outgrown them, and thought them childish. Basil Godfrey, however, had always entered into them with satisfaction, and she opened her preliminaries with the expression of a wish that they might see a good deal of him while they were in the country. He had intended this for his only visit to Cricklade, and he said so. Both the girls broke into a remonstrance:

“You *must* go with us to Dovedale,” pleaded Blanche; and “You *must* go with us to Chatsworth,” urged Belle, but, for once, there was a decided negation in Basil's countenance. He declared that his engagements were so numerous and impossible to rescind, and his time at Ashford was so short, that he could not venture to promise them his escort on either occasion. Joan had not heard of these many and pressing engagements, and wondered what they were; not considering, simple soul! that they could be to

herself, until Basil told her so as they were driving gently home.

“We have seen the last of him; we have seen the last of the delightful Basil Godfrey we used to know!” said Aunt Amelia with a tragical sigh to her daughters when he was gone. “I suspected how it would be when he went back to Oxford. He is up to the neck in plots and plans for doing good in his generation, and he is over head and ears in love. Good-bye to him—when we meet again he will be as heavy a bore as John.”

John’s devoted wife took up her protest against this. “I suspect, Aunt Amelia, that Mr. Godfrey is weary of milk for babes, and being a strong man wants meat. For my part, I would almost as lief take a turn at the treadmill as be condemned to your life for a month.”

“My dear Lexcey, what do I do that is so disagreeable? Why, I do absolutely *nothing*!”

“That is just it. You do *nothing*, and I would rather do *anything* than do *that*.”

When Basil brought Joan safely back to the

crow's-nest between four and five o'clock, he told her with sudden recollection, that his sister had ordered him to take her up to the Parsonage to dine and spend the evening. She hesitated, but he insisted: "You must come. We have had a great chafe but it is appeased, and Nelly is quite ready to give us her blessing. Don't let any coolness increase between you, my darling. I hate family dissension."

Joan consented to come presently—up the field, if he would take the pony carriage home. She had to dress, and he might meet her in the garden. He was her dearest, best friend! She could not deny herself his presence, though she felt a little on her dignity with Nelly and the sarcastic rector, who could never forget that she was his old schoolmaster's daughter, whose natural place was a long way below the salt.

But this evening he was pleasant and easy with her as with an equal, and perhaps Joan had her own appearance to thank for it. It is hard to say how high or how low goes the influence of clothes. "I knew she was a lady

because she was dressed so well on a week-day," had been the remark of a lodging-house keeper at Torquay to Mr. Franklyn concerning his own wife; and if the same rule was in force at Ashford, Joan Abbott conformed to it by a lady-like propriety of attire all the year round. She wore on this occasion the same dress of black silk and crape as she had worn at The Hurst, with chemisette and sleeves of puffed tulle, and jet ornaments, but she had put a cluster of scarlet geraniums in her hair behind one ear, and another cluster in the knot on the bosom of her dress; and the rector, who was not used to see her except in simple morning costume, thought if there was any fault in her, it was too much stateliness for her age. Her tall figure was very erect and well-poised; the carriage of her head, its contour, the form of her throat and bust, the oval of her cheek, and round full white chin, were noble. But for the sweetness of her deep eyes and the tenderness of her mouth, there would have been an almost statuesque severity in her face, the features of

which were perfect, from the waved line of the hair on the straight low brow, to the delicate nostril and rosy lip curved like Cupid's bow.

Basil had met her in the garden as she wished, had uncloked her in the hall, and brought her into the drawing-room on his arm. Mr. Franklyn and his wife and little Olive were there; and up sprang Olive from the rug, and made them a fine curtsey and said: "Oh, Aunt Joan, how beautiful you are! You are like the Princess in the Fairy Book! Is not Aunt Joan beautiful, mama?"

Mrs. Franklyn kissed Joan blushing and said "Yes;" but it was old news, that her glass must have told her very often.

"And Uncle Basil too, many a time, I know," quoth the elf, wagging her head—wise before its time—from study of fairy lore perhaps.

Joan's cheek and Basil's too owned the soft impeachment—that was probably one of the things he said to her when he did not pay her the compliment of talking sense. The rector laughed, muttered something about an

enfant terrible, and as Duffell announced dinner, gave Joan his arm to lead her in.

They were but a party of four—and no one could be better company than Mr. Franklyn when he gave his mind to it. He did now; and the conversation turning on foreign travel, never flagged for lack of one or another to keep it up. A little while ago, Joan would have been silent unless directly addressed, lest she should seem to presume, and especially she would have been silent before the rector, but Basil had given her a little instruction of what was due to herself and to him, and she profited by it very prettily to take her share in the talk.

They all left the dinner-table together, and in the drawing-room had music and singing, and the first fire of the autumn, which was in itself something to admire and discuss.

“I like the light summer evenings so long as they are warm, but when we must begin to draw the curtains for dinner, give me the coziness and comfort of a fire,” said the rector. “In

this country we need one nearly all the year round. I always marvel at delicate people going to winter abroad when the appliances for keeping them warm are so much less efficient than at home. Was it not often terribly cold in Rome, Joan Abbott ? ”

Mr. Franklyn found Joan very conversible about Rome. She knew the city as a classical and mediæval scholar alone could teach her to know it, by giving her conversational lectures on every famous spot for weeks and months together ; pouring into her receptive mind the ripe fruits of his own knowledge in return for the word pictures that she drew him of the beauties in life or in ruin that he could not see.

The rector did not give the fact of her simple origin a thought while she was there, but when she was gone, and Basil with her to see her safely home, he said to his wife, “ Education is a great leveller, Nelly, and a more refining agent than money. It is really astonishing—Joan Abbott would pass in any company.”

“Have you only just discovered that, Edward?”
was the reply with a provoking triumph.

“Only this evening, my dear. She improves on me as she gains confidence; and her confidence is of that agreeable sort which grows out of a woman’s assurance that she is pleasing.”

“And you think, then, that Basil may marry her without derogating from his position?”

“Yes. There are certain advantages that she will never possess,—family, fortune, association, and so forth, which he may find the want of in the future—but I have no doubt now that she will make him a perfect wife. There is something very charming in her when she ceases to be reserved.”

“Since you are converted, I will not despair of Colonel Godfrey—but I hope he will come round sooner or Basil will have still a long time to wait.”

“Basil is improved too—the sense of responsibilities increasing gives his character the ballast and seriousness it stood in need of. I am better pleased with him this visit than ever before.

He is one of those men who mature late and slowly. I shall entertain high hopes of his future career."

"Would you have entertained them, Edward, if he had been unsuccessful at Standen?"

"Perhaps not—it would have depended on how he had borne his disappointment."

"We can all foresee good things for a man when he is in luck!—Well, Edward, I do think you have undervalued him and Joan too." This accusation came out rather shrewishly; and the rector who perhaps felt the truth of it, turned it aside, with a good-natured intimation that perhaps they had been mutually in error.—And Basil was at the door.

CHAPTER LXII.

APPLE-GATHERING AT THE CROW'S NEST.

BASIL GODFREY showed no scruple about claiming Joan's society at any early time of the day, however the blind curate might feel himself defrauded. He was in the lightest, most sanguine mood since his arrival at Ashford. He was almost perfectly happy. His sister said he was like a holiday in the house. If his kinsman would only relent towards his love, the whole world would smile on him, he thought. As he walked down the field after breakfast with the crow's-nest in view, he turned over in his mind divers expedients for subduing the old man's obduracy, and was confident that one or another might be brought to bear on it successfully. Nelly had judged him rightly in

this—in Joan's company he grew impatient of their probation as having endured long enough, and was eager to devise a term to it. That it should be protracted indefinitely seemed intolerable to him, and he vowed in his heart that he would not have it so protracted. He would talk to Joan to-day—he would risk his uncle's displeasure; he would defy it, if need were, and marry her before Christmas! This was a sudden, hasty conception that entered into his brain as Joan came into the porch, and met him with the announcement that they were going to have their apple-gathering, and she was busy; but if he pleased, he could come and help her—really *help* her, not hinder, as he generally did hinder work of hers.

He consented to anything, and they went together into the orchard-garden, where there was a ladder in one laden tree, and a boy up it, pulling the ripe rosy fruit. Mr. Paget was talking from the study window to his mother below, who had one basket on her arm and another for Joan's use. The old lady gave Basil

a good-humoured nod, and asked what he was come for, as they wanted no idle people there; then gave Joan her basket with a charge not to neglect her business. Joan promised diligence, and led the way to the espaliers she was to clear—Basil might have stripped a taller tree, but perhaps he thought he should work better in good company.

“Do you like Ribston pippins, Joan? They are the sweetest apples that are grown,” was his first beginning of the conversation. Then presently: “What do you do with all this fruit at the crow’s-nest—eat it? You must live on apples!”

“Eat it! We sell it—it is part of our fortune. We get some new books when the apples are sold. These are going to Derby,” replied Joan with her head down and hands full and an air of earnest occupation. Basil looked at her over the top of the espalier and laughed and chucked a large apple into her basket. “O, Basil, don’t do that—you will bruise them!” cried she, and then laughed too at the seriousness

of her reproach. They both stood up to rest a minute from their toils, and naturally fell a-talking over their tender affairs.

“ You love a country-life, Joan, and so do I. Pulling apples pleases me much more than canvassing for votes. What a delicious air this is ! Who was that old Roman who was happiest cultivating his cabbages ? I envy him—I should like to imitate him. If my uncle does not promise me soon to receive you friendly, I will take that farm in Hampshire he offered me once, and you shall feed poultry while I plough ! ”

“ Not give up your seat in Parliament, Basil ? Oh, many a day would you regret it at the plough, and I should hate my cocks and hens that cost you that ! ”

“ I am safe till the next election, and betwixt now and then lie several years, perhaps, and various chances for us. The old colonel cannot bear malice. He is good and honourable and perfectly unreasonable. It is my belief that if I were to tell him I had concluded, for his argument's sake, to throw you over, that he

would spit in my face! And I should deserve it. It would be the safer risk to defy him by a prompt disobedience. What say you, Joan? I am ready if you are ready. I have no taste for wearing life away in attendance on his prejudices."

Basil's voice was low and earnest, and Joan answered touchingly: "I shall have to accept all from you, Basil—don't let me be burthened with remorse too. Consider what that would be if I lost you your career. Could I bear it and be happy, being myself?"

"You are proud, Joan. You ought to feel no burthen in what I give you for love."

"What you give me for love will never weigh on my heart—but if I take anything for *selfishness*?"

"Selfishness! You are all my luck, dearest—it is bound up in you! I know I shall live better and work better with you near than alone. You will come into my mind a thousand times a day from a distance, and so you'll distract me. When I wear you in my heart, instead

of straying after you, my hopes will rest in you, and I shall be perfectly content."

"Ah, Basil, that is lovers' talk!" said Joan, with a tender smile on her face. "Try to feel like a husband following the plough, who might have held the helm of state—and all for a sad-faced woman scattering grain in a poultry-yard. For I should be very sad—a melancholy, dismal Joan, if your disappointment reproached me."

"Thou art a very literal Joan! There are more careers than one open to a man who carries the keys of knowledge. If you don't think hob-nails will suit me, I'll turn lawyer and wear a wig, and you shall be lamp to my dusty chambers in the Temple! or I'll turn parson, and you shall help me write my sermons as every good wife of a parson should—for my wife you must and shall be before either of us is twelve months older."

"Dear Basil, the apples are waiting to be gathered—to marry in haste is to repent at leisure, you know."

"I love you best with your mouth shut, sweetheart; it was made for something better than the speaking of proverbs. I cannot abide contradiction—it is a most pestilent fault in a woman."

"The apples, the apples, the apples," said Joan, and stooped again to her task. "I have my own opinion of contradiction."

"You have excellent principles, and they are your own; but your opinions—a fig for your opinions!" retorted Basil. "They are just woven of other people's ravelled threads. You shall have an original, new suit—"

"And take their colour from you," mischievously interrupted Joan.

"She is a mistress of the art of fence!" cried Basil, as if appealing to some umpire between them. "How long may she be warranted to hold in one mood? Is she as perversely fantastical all the year round?"

"That depends on the moon—my basket is full. Oh, Basil, was there ever such nonsense talked in the world before?"

“ You should know best, you are deeper in philosophy than I. Are you happy, Joan ? ”

“ Yes—but don't bruise the apples, dear Basil.”

“ Then we are wiser than all the sages, for I am happy too. There are no more apples on my side of the tree—I must come round to yours.” As Basil suited the action to the word, Mrs. Paget sauntered observantly that way. The lovers had not made as much progress in the fruit-gathering as they might have done ; Joan would have gathered more by herself, she said ; there were yet three espaliers to strip—she would take one, and Joan might take the second, and Basil the third, which stood away by itself at the lowest part of the garden.

“ Thank you,” said Basil, making the old lady a preposterous bow, “ but that espalier is in the shade ; I'd rather stay in my sunshine,” with a merry look at Joan most dutifully active at her task.

Joan lifted herself up for a moment and remarked to her godmother that the fruit was beautiful, and there was a great deal of it—much

more than last year. Mrs. Paget gave her a shrewd searching glance: there had been an extraordinary orchard-harvest last year—only Joan had forgotten and she wanted a remark to make, and this did as well as another to dissipate her air of confusion. What had Basil been saying to her? Something not unkind, for they had the appearance of being very sociable together. It was a pity to spoil their comfort when their time was not likely to be long: with this reflection the good old lady sauntered away again, and was presently seen herself, clearing the solitary espalier that grew in the shade. She was by far the steadiest worker of the three. As for Basil, he soon flagged again, and wanted Joan to go for a walk in the water-meads.

“I cannot—this is my morning’s duty,” replied she, austere, not so much as looking up. “If you are tired of it, go for a walk in the water-meads with my master who is left to himself—he will enjoy it.”

Basil declined the suggestion—he would rather stay apple-gathering with her, and forthwith he

began to play at ball with one of the largest and rosiest culled from her basket. His impromptu game bye-and-bye carried him half-way down the garden, then out of sight. Several times Joan glanced after him, amused at the boyish eagerness with which he kept it up, and as he disappeared, her basket being again full, she set off to carry it indoors and return. But Mr. Paget heard her step and called to her, and when she came into the study, and found him weary of silence, she stayed, took down the book they were engaged on at that time of day, and began her usual reading. In a few minutes she espied Basil making his way back to the place where he had left her, and she could not help laughing at his surprised halt, and quick turn in search of her behind the espaliers. She let him seek her and made no sign. He went to inquire of her god-mother, still gleaning in the shade, and got no information from her; he mounted the little terrace and looked over the wall to the water-meads, if by good luck she had changed her mind and gone out there. No. He came down again, and towards

the house, when peering up at the study window, he saw her head bent over a book, and the blind curate all attention opposite.

“I thought I'd lost you, Joan!” cried he.

“In pursuit of an apple,” rejoined she, and shook her head at his invitation to come out again.

Mr. Paget asked an explanation, and Joan told him how Basil had begun to play at ball and had been decoyed out of her sight by his toy, and she had vanished in his absence, and on his return had not been found.

“One might weave that into a parable,” said the curate, and Joan with a second negative shake of her head at her lover still pleading with eloquent gestures under the window, went on with her reading.

Basil could do nothing under these circumstances, but either go back to the parsonage, or accomplish Joan's interrupted task. He chose the latter, and having no distractions, made a quick clearance of the fruit-trees she had abandoned. She saw him come to and fro

with his basket full repeatedly, and looking out at length to nod him her approval, he told her he was then bringing in the last, and begged to know, as he had finished her work, whether she would be free for a walk in the afternoon. "Say yes, Joan," interposed Mr. Paget; so Joan said "Yes," and they had their walk in the water-meads as he wished; and during the walk a renewal of the morning's discussion which she had put off.

Less than a month ago Joan had been bitterly wounded by the notion that Basil could possibly have the patience to wait for her ten years; now some new truths had entered into her mind, and she felt the utmost reluctance to let him pledge himself to any fixed period for their marriage.

"I should be none the happier now—I cannot trust you more than I do," said she.

"You anticipate changes in your godmother's family—we cannot tell how things may affect your position in it. I should like to take you away beforehand," urged Basil.

“ You cannot, dear. You are in a transition state yourself. You are going to keep your last term at Oxford, and to get your degree. That will bring us to Christmas—the changes here will have taken place before then. And the new year opens your new life—by next autumn you will have felt your footing in the world where you have to live, and will be in better case to speak as your own master—and mine. I’m afraid you will be far too serious and stately a personage to help us gather the apples any more !” Joan laughed with a little wistful doubting at this last suggestion, which she introduced to soften what sounded over reasonable in her preceding speech.

Basil took it quite in good part. “ Of course I shall ; young members are always conceited,” rejoined he. “ We want to get up *instantly* on the dais of government and glory ; but a judicious fortune keeps most of us plodding and serving an apprenticeship to our party for ten, twenty, thirty years, and sometimes never rewards us with a taste of the sweets of office after all. I will not promise

you that shall not be my own fate. I don't mean to sacrifice principle for dignity without honour. You may never have to glow for me as great, my darling ; but you shall never have to blush for me as mean."

"I am sure of that, Basil ! I will be proud of you though you do no more than put the drag on when the coach is going down hill too fast : and I will not call it an unworthy position though you do no more than prevent the wheels locking. But at the same time I think, I *think* that one day you will be conductor if not driver."

"When I am bald and thou art grey, my bonny love ! I cannot look so far forward. I want to take my life as heretofore, in short steps and with enjoyment. Will you accept my promise for next September, Joan ? "

"I would accept it, Basil, but I dread when it falls due that I may have to accept a great sacrifice and risk on your future."

"If you loved me you would accept it at all hazards," urged Basil, with reproach.

"I do love you—I love you with all the love

in my heart! Don't be angry with me, Basil—you know I love you."

"I see where the difficulty lies. In spite of yourself, Nelly has infected you with her doubts and fears. You think that more communion with men will make more of a man of me—that I have too much enthusiastic youth in my blood to be quite firm in my mind; and you would rather be rejected by my mature judgment than chosen by my generous inclination? Those are just Colonel Godfrey's sentiments from another side."

Joan blushed painfully—it had never occurred to her that she could be rejected by his mature judgment. There might arise circumstances that would separate them, but she never imagined herself other than a good and tender image in his memory. After a moment's silence she looked up at him with kind clear eyes and said: "No, Basil, you have not quite spoken my mind. I am not afraid that your mature judgment of me will be any lower than your judgment now. If I become your wife, you will have no friend

more faithful. If death or any other mischance drift me away, I hope you will have no dearer remembrance. I am sure you love me now, and I believe you will love me always. Have the same confidence in me, and let us leave bonds of dates to those that need them. You are generous, let me be a little generous too."

"I would rather thou wert more exacting," said Basil, sighing with an air of discontent. "I am in a giving humour."

"A temporary state of mind!" rejoined Joan in the same tone of half jesting that he had assumed, and they were reconciled again. So their arguments and lovers' quarrels always ended in the renewal of peace.

It was a very lovely afternoon in the fields, and they wandered all the way to the Whorlstone Delve. There were no lilies now—only bracken touched here and there with frosty fire, and dark green underwood, and scarlet berries in lieu of wild roses. The beck ran, shallow, and low-voiced, the winds were all asleep in the thick tree-tops, and not a bird or insect-note was heard.

“How different to the joyous wakeful spring!” said Joan. “How different to that summer day when we were here before!”

“Yes, and what a long time ago it seems. Dear Joan! you were but a shy rustic lassie then, and you took my strawberries so prettily,” said Basil, with rallying fondness.

“Did I? I always loved strawberries! It was a very happy day, but it won’t come back again!”

“Happier days will come though, and without long waiting for, I trust. Have you not read in some of your old wiseacres of books that true wives love their husbands better than girls their lovers? It is so, whether you have or not. And surely you know that women are happier the more they love?”

“I will tell you, Basil,” said Joan, dropping her voice in sweet confidence. “When I was younger I used to pray God to give me a happy life and good days, and to keep me from all sorrow, disappointment, and distress—that used to be my prayer—every night and morning only

that. And then you came, and I joined you in it until, all at once lately, I don't know how or when, I forgot it, and when I remembered it again, I had fallen into the habit of another petition—that God would bless us together, if it were well—and if not, that he would sanctify our separate lives.”

“Ah, Joan, that is almost like praying against me—I like your first prayer best,” said Basil. “‘Give us good life and happy days, keep us from all sorrow, disappointment, and distress, O Lord!’—that shall be my litany till death us doth sever. Let us get out of this wood, darling, it makes us melancholy.”

Melancholy is not always a painful mood. On their way home they were more seriously happy than they had been all the day.

LXIII.

IN THE FALL OF THE LEAF.

BASIL GODFREY remained only a week at Ashford, but it was a delightful week, and all sufficing for the restoration of Joan's peace. They parted without any definite or conditional period being fixed for their marriage, because Joan would have it so; but Basil went away sanguine that events would promote the early accomplishment of his desires if ideas continued to stand in their way. Of one thing he was sure—Colonel Godfrey would never require of him any act that could attach the shadow of dishonour to his name. He might withhold from him that independence which would enable him to marry Joan, and at the same time to maintain the position he had taken up; but he would not insist on a specific

breach with her as a condition of continuing him in his privileges already conferred. She was not a woman to whom it would have been possible to propose a clandestine marriage; but while they were both faithful and patient, their future was not in the hands of his kinsman, but in the hand of God.

When Basil was gone again, the daily routine at the crow's-nest, which had been interrupted for a time, was resumed, and the next memorable event there was the arrival of Miss Alice Rotheram on a visit. Joan took to her very kindly. She was not young, but she was bright and sunny; a fair, plump woman with serene eyes, a soft voice, and a busy, quiet way, as of a person given to management. When she came, Joan Abbott's occupation was gone—she took possession of the blind curate, read to him, walked with him, played and sang to him, and lapt his soul in every comfort that he loved. Mrs. Paget and Joan were left to themselves and each other, and talked that *it* would do very well—beautifully. “Caleb will be happy with her; she will take

care of him when I am gone," said the satisfied mother, and Joan submitted with resigned content to her own deposition.

At this period Nicholas Kempe quitted the country. Joan was sorrier than she could have believed when she missed him in church. They had not met often elsewhere of late, and that he recognised her life as filled was plain in his words of farewell.

"Good-bye, Cousin Joan, I've been very fond of you ever since I can remember, and I shan't forget you where I'm going. You've all you want now, so I'm quit of a promise I made your mother never to leave Ashford while it seemed likely I could help you. I've seen less and less of you this six months past, and as I'm satisfied it is all right with you at last, I'm off. God bless you, little lass, God bless you and him, both."

Joan was not fluent in farewells, but she wrung his hard hands and looked at him through tears—he had been always very good to her, and it was a life-long parting.

“Aye,” replied he. “I shall never come back—the old place won’t know me no more.”

It was strange and sad to Joan to go by the forge, and see a new face there, and hear no singing. It seemed to her that the village was no longer itself. Many a time in the late October when the winds piped keen, and leaves were whirling down from the trees, did she wander along Ridgway, and think how completely her future would be severed from her past, except in the fading scenes of memory, and muse and dream whether it was thus with other people’s lives.

Basil Godfrey went first to Paris with his uncle, and after a brief stay, returned to Oxford to keep his last term, and take his degree. While he was there, Joan was very busy with Mrs. Paget, preparing for a permanent change at the crow’s-nest. Early in November Mr. Paget went up to town with Alice Rotheram, and about the middle of December brought her back to Ashford as his wife. The arrival of the new mistress led to new arrangements. The

old lady and Joan were to remain still at the crow's-nest; but Joan, being superseded in her duties, would not consent to remain dependent on their means. She made her agreement with Alice, who was full of sense without being deficient in sensibility, and was allowed to pay to the domestic exchequer a sum adequate for her own maintenance. Mrs. Paget and her son resisted this at first, but Joan asked why she should hoard the money her wits span, and declared that she should be much more at her ease in the house bearing a share of its expenses, since she had now no service to do, and only needed protection.

Thus it was settled, discreetly for everybody's comfort in the result, and all seemed in cue for going as smoothly and tranquilly as of old under the roof of the crow's-nest. But while the last brown leaves of the beeches still rustled in the frosty air unfallen, one person began to find the place dull, and this was the new-made wife. Born and bred in the neighbourhood of London, Alice had no real taste for a pastoral life. She

liked it for an interlude, she enjoyed idyllic descriptions of it in prose and verse, but her heart was in the bustle and variety of town. She opened her mind freely to Joan Abbott first. There was no society, she said, no visiting, and few callers. There were no concerts except of birds; no spectacles, no lectures, no anything but getting up, eating, reading, and going to bed. She did not put on an air of unhappiness or discontent; she loved her husband and his mother, and Joan's society was pleasant to her; but she frankly thought the background of their existence so deadly dull, that it was a marvel to her how they could have endured it these many years patiently. She was quite sure they would all grow a dozen years younger and brighter if they were transported from the sylvan shades of Ashford to that dear old house on Kensington Mall which was her portion in marriage, and which the tenant was about to vacate at Lady-day. It had a garden with fine trees in it, and a green-house, and spacious rooms, and was altogether as nice as the crow's-nest, besides

being within ten minutes' reach of a thousand delightful amusements that were hundreds of miles away from that rural paradise.

Joan Abbott was not without sympathy in Alice's feelings. There had been moments during the past year when she had experienced the severest pangs of *tedium vitæ*, and had longed with an almost passionate longing to spread her wings and take flight into that higher and wider sphere made radiant by Basil Godfrey's presence. But old Mrs. Paget had no sympathy with her daughter-in-law at all, and was gravely distressed when she understood the grounds of her dissatisfaction. She could not see how any sensible person could find the place tiresome where she and Caleb had lived in contentment for twenty years, and where dear Joan Abbott, except for eighteen months, had lived ever since she was born. Alice did not attempt to reason, she only reiterated her complaint; adding that her own house on Kensington Mall would be empty in spring, and they might just as well all go and live there, and let the crow's-nest.

But the rent of the house on the Mall was a fourth of the income of the united families, and could they afford to give it up? objected the old lady; the rent of the crow's-nest would be a very small matter indeed to replace it.

The blind curate was not taken into counsel until his wife and mother were verging to a quarrel, and he settled the matter briefly by declaring that his means were not ample enough to keep up the Kensington house in any sort of comfort; but if Alice could bring her mind to be satisfied with a smaller place and in a less expensive suburb, then he would consider with her the expediency of leaving Ashford. But Alice would live in her own house or none, and the question was permitted to drop. She accepted what must have been a disappointment, and in some sort, a mortification, with the utmost cheerfulness. But there was a vein of selfish resolution in her character which made her adhere with tenacity to any scheme of her own conception, and Joan Abbott did not foresee far wide of the mark when she observed to her

godmother after the subject was closed : “ Alice seems to have given up her wish, but I am much deceived in her if she does not succeed in transporting us all to Kensington before six months are over.”

To Joan also the winter was long, but not intolerably long. Now that she was more at leisure at home, she went to the Hurst occasionally, as well as to the parsonage, and the beginning of the new year she spent at Cricklade rectory. Basil Godfrey did not appear at Ashford at Christmas, as his sister and perhaps somebody else hoped that he might. He was at Whinmore, at Hauxwell, at Castle Harbinger, cultivating his country neighbours ; his uncle, who had returned from abroad on purpose, being with him. Mrs. Franklyn allowed that this was a duty not good to be neglected, but she murmured that he might have given them, though it were but a single day, on his road from Oxford to the north—he passed within twenty miles of Ashford. She did not know how alertly jealous and watchful over his nephew’s movements the old Colonel

was at this period, nor how tenacious and difficult in his temper cold weather made him, or she would have found excuse for Basil as Joan did—to whom he wrote how much he longed to be with her all this time that it was expedient he should keep away.

The Young Squire, as Basil's familiar title now was at Whinmore, had come out with honour from the Oxford examinations; but his brilliant successes seemed of little account to his kinsman since his conquest of Standen. He himself and Joan alone set much store by his university bays; Joan would not have exchanged them for all the plaudits of all the voters in that venal little borough since she had learnt their private views on the value of the suffrage, but the Colonel was of a far different opinion. Never ambitious for himself, he began to manifest an eager, impatient ambition for his heir, which sometimes threatened to make Basil's life a burthen to him. He must push his influence here, extend his interest there, assert his consequence and make himself friends everywhere—

a public man never could foresee who might or who might not be useful to him. Basil was bidable to a certain point and no further. He would forego none of his independence of feeling or speech to flatter either lord or yeoman. The veteran Earl at Castle Harbinger found him willing to listen, but not easy to convince; and the dogmatic landlord of the White Hart pronounced him "far over stiff-set in his own notions to suit *him*."

Joan Abbott had many a happy laugh over Basil's letters at this season, which were frequent and full of details of his life in the county; for he wrote to her with the most open, enjoying confidence. Nor did he remit it when he went up to London in February for the opening of parliament. It was a great event his taking of his seat in the House—Joan and his sister and the Colonel treated it as a most remarkable event. Basil liked their approbation, their affectionate interest, even their flattery. It was his character. He had no visions of standing alone in his glory. Let him push ever so far, or rise.

ever so high, in the paths of public usefulness and honour, it might safely be predicted of him that he would always find his dearest reward, not in the plaudits of the world outside, but in the tender sympathy of a few who loved him, and who would love him equally in all sorts of times.

LXIV.

LETTERS FROM THE COUNTRY.

PARLIAMENT had been* sitting six weeks, and London was full. Basil Godfrey was in the first flush of popularity. He had delivered his maiden speech in the House, terse, to the point, and lightly touched with humour. He spoke on the spur of a happy moment, and with the happiest effect. He had begun excellently well, and would have the respectful ear of the House henceforward; for sagacious and experienced men predicted great things of him. He had proved himself dextrous and brilliant, ready-witted and fearless; the leader of the conservative party pronounced him the most promising of the young members returned to the new parliament, and said they must keep

an eye on him. Standen was proud of its representative; Colonel Godfrey held up his head for pride, and took a house in Curzon Street for the season, to make his nephew a home, and to watch his progress. The old man was happier than he had been for many a year.

The Easter holidays Basil spent in Berkshire at Lord Crosfel's seat there, and when he returned to town, he found himself in high social request. Lady Marian Wallace had come up for a little gaiety, and if he had not been able to plead business on committees in the morning, and the House in the evening, she would have converted him soon into a hack of pleasure. He was unmarried, he was handsome, he was in the position of an eldest son, heir to great estates, he was a delightful person, and no good things that society had was she unwilling to lay at his feet. But it was very hard to turn Basil into a haunter of drums, of ball-rooms, of crowded staircases, and ante-rooms. He preferred walking home with a cigar when the House broke up, and rising before the dust and heat of the day

to ride with the Colonel, who had no joy in London to compare with his nephew's company.

Summer was come almost before they were aware of it. But the time that slipped by Basil so lightly was becoming long at the crow's-nest, very long to Joan who half lived on his good news, his weekly news, to which she replied by letters almost amusing for their dulness, and redolent of country air. Here is one—

“You know the gossamer threads spiders weave across the room in this fine summer weather? I am sitting in the study window looking up the valley, with my book on the sill, and this sheet of paper covering the page that I ought to be reading (but I am writing to you instead), and a spider has swung his tight-rope in front of my eyes, and will presently come dancing along it, quite heedless of me. He has found me out as one of his kin—a porer over brown and yellow books; for we are fonder of old editions here than of new, and when I open some from top shelves, dust flies out that smells as old as the

parish register. I like to read the marginal notes written by hands dead generations ago, and to imagine who and what the people were that wrote them. The books here are the gleanings of centuries, and some of them are profusely annotated. I have a great veneration for antiquity—don't tell me that is because I know so little about it.

“Do you make notes in your books that I shall read some day? Here is a note of mine for you, but one on real life—an original view of The Union. You remember the shrivelled old deaf dairy-man at Halsted Farm? No—well then, sir, he is one of our Ashford worthies, born eighty years ago, and he has just retired to the Union on the same plea as pious Catholics go into retreat—*pour faire son salut*. He asked a dole of me to help him on his way, and said some of his friends had given him a few ounces of tobacco, and some had given him a shilling, and he was going into the Union to get ready for The Other Country. I declare, Basil, it sounded quite pathetic, and brought the tears into my eyes. The world is too much with all of us; and

this was his way of escaping from under its yoke. Every day, he said, was busy alike at the Farm; there was no Sabbath rest, and it was time he gave up troubling about the kye, and thought of his soul. He had been in the Union one hard winter before, and was very comfortable. He gave me an invitation to visit him there, and was very proud and pleased that Mrs. Hubbard had shaken him by the hand, and promised that she and Flowy would go and see him the first time they drove to Whorlstone. I love the simple annals of the poor, dear Basil: the annals of the people without a history.

“Yesterday I was at the parsonage—I don’t remember that we did anything but eat strawberries and talk about you—our inexhaustible theme for admiration and speculation. Your ears ought to have burnt. Olive, pertly echoing somebody else, asked if “Punch” had begun to chaff you yet. Nelly told her you did not anticipate that honour until you went into spectacles. ‘Ah, then,’ said little miss, ‘Judy will have broken him in to it first.’

“On Saturday afternoon Mr. Gerrard Spencer was here, and he also talked about you. The poor young man is more shy and self-conscious than ever, and still harps laboriously on the one string of his disappointed life, while he tells us that he comes here because he is sure of sympathy—that balm for the unfortunate.

“Next week they cut the grass in the glebe meadows, and if the weather hold fine, we are to have the school feast while the hay is down. This is the only piece of dissipation, the only event we have in present prospect.”

And here is another letter written a fortnight later. Joan's letters to Basil at this time contained all her life.

“I think, dear love, that changes are looming over us here, and whether to be glad or sorry, I cannot tell. Do you recollect my telling you in the winter that Mrs. Caleb Paget was wearying of our dulness, and that she wanted to forsake the crow's-nest for a home in town? She gave up her own wishes, when shown their impracticability at that time, but she is reverting

to them again now, and it seems probable that she will carry the day by making her plans feasible. Her marriage-portion consisted of a house in Kensington Mall, which was then let, but is now empty. She wants to move us all there and to add to our family a sister of her own, and your bachelor friend Philip Baynes, the artist, who was a sort of half tenant with the last occupier, and built a studio out into the garden for his own use. He does not want to move, and Mrs. Caleb thinks the mixed household will be pleasant. Her husband is willing to let her rule, but my dear old godmother does not like the prospect. As for me, I do not feel that I have any right to a voice in the matter: where my old protectors go, I must go.

“I have had a letter from my cousin Nicholas Kempe. He had pitched his tent with our kindred in the wilderness when he wrote. Our Uncle Amos has seven sons, the three elder mighty hunters like himself, the others growing up to the same wild life, and a daughter called Joan, after my mother, who, Nicholas says, reminds him

of me. They are sending me home a parcel of furs, 'fit for a queen to wear,' and Uncle Amos talks that he would like to see England again before he dies. He was only a lad of nineteen when he went to Canada, but he took a wife with him, and they have prospered. Seven sons are riches to a man in the backwoods, and the girl Joan can handle a rifle, drive a sledge, and ride with the best of them. She came with her father sixty miles to meet Nicholas. I fancy that life would have suited me if I had been left in a state of nature and not trained in the ways of civilization. What say you, Basil? If the world ill-use us, shall we go to the backwoods?"

At the beginning of July the fate of the crow's-nest was settled, and Joan wrote to 'announce the fact.

"It is decided, dear Basil, we are to leave this place where we have been so happy! I wish my kind old godmother took more hopefully to the change: then, I think I should mind it less myself—on some accounts I should be glad of it—especially glad as it would bring us oftener within

each other's reach. And I should get some glimpses of the world, and not grow so out of date amongst my books. Are London manners very different to country manners? Shall I have to learn a new curtsy, my dear? Must I leave behind me the red roses that I wear here on my cheeks? I laugh with delight to think that perhaps we shall meet before the month is out! I feel as happy as a child going to have a holiday! My good master pulls up my spirits with a musty old philosophical saw about 'moderate expectations.'—Ah, Basil, I think, it must be easier to expect *no* happiness, than to expect a little, and to be satisfied.

“It is a rainy day—the water-meads are lost in a cloud of storm, and the cattle-bridge has been washed away by the river in flood: such an impetuous little river it is in a passion! I never remember so wet a Midsummer before. Alice says, ten times a day, how she shall rejoice to turn her back on sylvan delights, and see groves of gas lamps once more. Her husband

says nothing—all is the same to him so that he have peace and the voices of those he loves about him. Almost she has persuaded him that he will be happier at Kensington, and probably he will, if she be perfectly contented.”

Ten days later, Joan wrote again to report the progress of events.

“The ‘married people’ have gone to town before us to settle themselves in the house on the Mall, and Alice says, ‘to prepare for our reception.’ I think the truth is that she wishes to have her husband to herself a little while—and I commend her for it. There will not be much freedom of association in the polyglot family she proposes to constitute under her roof. My godmother and I are far from feeling sure that it will suit our fastidiousness. My cousin Ruth Ashe has two pretty little chambers looking up Ashleigh Dingle, where she lodges stray artists in the fine season, we sometimes propose to make us a new perch there if the birds of Kensington Mall prove of too rude and migratory habits to please us. The crow’s-nest is let to an

overworked London parson with a lot of little children—happy London parson and happy little children! You would not know the dear old study now it is emptied of all its tenants. I look in about once a day, glance at the vacant shelves, the bare table, and fly. We sit in the parlour, and stare at the tall shrubs, and feel unaccountably sad. I say ‘unaccountably,’ for who will miss us here? What shall we miss in going away but inanimate things? Thank you, dear Basil, for your eagerness to welcome me—shall I not ‘smother’ with satisfaction behind the brass trellis of the Ladies’ Gallery if only I may hear you speak in the House! And your visits to the Mall on Sunday afternoon will be the white hours of the week to me.

“Make my compliments to Lady Marian Wallace, and thank her for her amiable intentions towards me, but I fear she will not have the opportunity of carrying them out, if she is leaving London next week. No day is yet fixed for our journey to London, but if it be delayed beyond the first of August, when Mr. Kenyon

and his family take possession of the crow's-nest, we are going to Cricklade. Your friend, the rector, gave us yesterday, a little mysteriously, the news that his wife's lively, fair cousins, Blanche and Belle, were going to be married in October to two brothers, both parsons and both country parsons. He fears his brethren will have a difficult task in reducing their wives' high spirits to proper clerical sobriety, and is astonished that 'Aunt Amelia' should consent to this very tame conclusion to their sportive youth. Mrs. John Seamer explains their choice as a case of imitation—they saw her happy, were emulous, and this is the result. If you have not seen them lately this will be news to you; for the engagements have only just received the sanction of the respective families. Do you know that Emmot Torre has voluntarily returned to the obscurity of Clapham, and that poor Elizabeth Seamer has resumed her laborious inaction as guide, philosopher and friend to that capricious lady?—so she writes to her sister-in-law. Mrs. Caleb Paget and Elizabeth Seamer are friends

of long standing; the Kensington and Clapham households will be intimate. I am afraid that it is written in the chapter of accidents that Emmot and I must meet, and I have not forgotten my old prejudice against her. Have you seen her since her return to town?

“What a long chat I have written you, dear. I shall stop lest I tire you, and I shall not write any more until the day is fixed for leaving the crow’s-nest. It gives me many a sudden pang to think of bidding Ashford good-bye as home—I went up the hill this morning to put the little garden on my two graves in order after the rainy weather. The sun was shining on them beautifully. Wherever I die and am buried I should like to have my name written on the stone below my father’s and mother’s—remember it, dear Basil. Though I pray God to give us length of days together, I would never forget or cut myself off quite from my own place and people.”

Only when it came to the last did Joan feel by how many and strong roots she was bound to the place of her birth. Her last letter from the

country to Basil in town was very pensive—almost sad.

“Going away from Ashford gives me a fore-taste of death, dear Basil. I never thought much of the finality of our departure until it came so near. I wish I could have stayed until you had come for me. It feels strangely like going adrift on an unknown sea—this going to London with the prospect of indefinite changes. And it has been driven so late that I shall hardly have more than one glimpse of you after all, and then you will be away to Paris, to Germany, to Whinmore or some of your great friends’ great houses. Your sister sighs over my disappointment and says: ‘Ah Joan, I told you so! He is growing too big for us—like to like is best, as Edward always said!’ I tried to toss her a scrap out of my wallet of old saws for retort, but I could only feel like Leonato, that I was flesh and blood, liable to be met with vexations: ‘For there was never yet philosopher could endure the tooth-ache patiently; however they have writ the style of gods, and made a pish at chance and sufferance.’

“I think Nelly will regret our going, but Mr.

Franklyn evidently looks for an agreeable variety in the company of the London parson. I never had any young associates here, but of the old people I know nearly all, and they are sorry, they say, to lose me. I shall be sorry to lose them too—when one's own heart is a little heavy nothing lightens it like carrying comfort to others who need it more. It is a great perplexity to me, Basil, the suffering of the poor.

“We shall have set out on our journey by the time you receive this letter. I am sure you will write or come to me as soon as you can in my strange home. I am going up now to my graves—for the last time. Nelly has promised that she will see them kept neat—I could not bear to think of them as neglected. The cattle-bridge has been rebuilt, but it is straight, and wide enough for a cart to go over, and is so new of stone and mortar that it looks not a bit like our dear old trysting-place. What an age it begins to seem since our first meeting there! I have your lilies still—have you my forget-me-nots?

“Your faithful and loving, Joan Abbott.”

CHAPTER LXV.

AT THE HOUSE ON THE MALL.

JOAN was not mistaken in her assurance that Basil Godfrey would write or come to her as soon as he could. She and Mrs. Paget arrived at the house on the Mall about two o'clock of the day, and she found a note in reply to her letter awaiting her. "I shall have no pity on your fatigues, sweetheart, but shall be with you about half-past four. Till then, my love to you; Basil." Joan's heart leapt for joy. How good he was to her, how careful not to let her feel any dilatoriness, any negligence at which her pride could take umbrage! She forgot that it was nearly twelve months since he had gone out of his way to see her, and he did not let her remember it when he came into the pretty old-

fashioned drawing-room which Alice had given up to her to receive him. His delight was full of the warm enthusiasm that she loved in him ; he declared that he had not had so perfect a moment since he saw her last, and that it was worth parting for the joy of meeting thus. Joan's eyes grew misty—the tears were always near them when she was the happiest, we have heard her say.

Basil began to talk about himself—to tell her the time was so occupied that it went incredibly fast with him. She looked at him, and could not tire of hearing ; so much more can be told than written in letters, and his more recent letters had been sometimes short, as he acknowledged. By-and-bye Colonel Godfrey's name was mentioned, and Basil exclaimed, jumping up and going to and fro' the room impatiently : “ He is none the less our adversary than last September, Joan. But it matters not. I say again what I said then—if you are ready, I am. Our difficulty with him, so far as I can see *now*, promises not to diminish but increase.”

Joan coloured and felt, Oh, how thankful that she had not suffered Basil to pledge himself to their marriage this autumn. "Well, dear," was all her reply.

"It is not well, Joan, it is ill," rejoined Basil. "You do not know how some perplexities grow and some obstacles multiply by being let alone beyond their due time. The more hostages one gives to fortune the harder it is to get out of the groove she has set us in. She takes from our courage and adds to our caution. My uncle heaps me with benefits—burthens me with camel-loads of kindness—I well know in what design. I wish I had only my knapsack and little gold pen to lay at your feet, my darling, and that I were once more the free man that I was four years ago!"

"Dear Basil!" murmured Joan in a voice that went to his heart. She understood him without many words. Nothing had happened that she had not foreseen. All his love was hers still, but he was more now the servant of the world, and his place in it was neither so easy nor so

right to hazard as it seemed ere he had put his hand to its work. Circumstances were changed and not only his point of view of them.

“My treasure, if you would only help me to be a little rash!” said he, but Joan shook her head.

“No, no, no, I will only help you to be sage,” responded she. “We are not yet quite a hundred years old—Let us talk of something else—am I to see your honourable House of Commons this session?”

“If you like; but our best talk is talked, our fiercest debates are settled, our hardest work is done. We have got through the annual Massacre of the Innocents in the shape of abortive bills, and are looking forward to our prorogation as eagerly as ever school-boys looked forward to their holidays.”

“And perhaps I should not have the superlative delight of hearing your beautiful voice?” said Joan laughing.

“No, that you would certainly not.”

“Then I will wait till next session, and pray that our stars may be more propitious.”

“Joan, you must surely be one of the most patient of women!” cried Basil; “a perfect Griselda.”

“Not by nature—I have a hard fight for it often. I am tired of being still and dull—but now, *now* I am going to see lions again, to hear music, to behold men instead of trees! You will find me next spring with all the moss rubbed off—heigho!” The process did not seem in anticipation much to her mind, for she spoke of it with a sigh.

“All the rubbing will not rub out the dear original woman,” said Basil tenderly.

When he went away towards dusk, he left Joan happy enough with the promise of another visit on the morrow. “It is of no use speculating beyond the day,” thought she to herself. “He is as good to me as ever—he has no idea of living without me, and what he cannot help, he cannot help!”

In the evening Alice would show her house to her new inmates and rehearse all her plans. Mr. Baynes had gone to Normandy, and they

rambled at large in his studio, of which his bedroom was a supplement—both redolent of paint and extinct pipes. Miss Elizabeth Rotheram accompanied the general review—a comely, practical, house-keeping personage of whose judgment, order and method her sister had the highest appreciation. She would evidently be the governing body of the establishment, and Alice the ornamental head.

Every part of the house seemed well-arranged and comfortable, and especially the blind master's quarters. His study was the cheerfulest room under the roof; it even had a bow-window, like the study at the crow's-nest, and a lovely acacia leaning over it, and all the delicious scents of the garden below. It had an organ set in a recess for him to make music at his leisure, and the books, old and new, were there in their former order, so exactly placed that the moment Joan espied one familiar friend, she knew where to look for all the rest.

And in the midst of his treasures the blind man was brisk and cheerful, and full of kind

commendation of what had been done to make him at home in the strange house. He had more space to move about in, there was a long wide gallery where he could walk quarter-deck on wet days, and he had discovered an agreeable variety in the new neighbours who had called upon him. He was glad of Miss Elizabeth's company because she set his wife at liberty to be with him, and he had relished the little he had seen of the cheerful Mr. Baynes before he started on his travels. In fact, all was rose-colour, and Alice having won her own way in the main, devoted herself to making everybody else comfortable in detail. She had allotted to her mother-in-law and Joan Abbott rooms communicating with each other, and looking upon the garden, and had neglected none of those small attentions that give to a new place an air of home and welcome. There were plants in Joan's window and flowers on her writing-table; and Mrs. Paget found herself provided with the easiest of easy chairs by the brightest of little fires; for summer though it professed to be, the

night was chill, and the glow in the grate was sociable and pleasant.

"Alice is very good at heart," said the old lady, talking to Joan through their open door as they were preparing for bed. "I had begun to dread lest she was selfish when she was so set on coming here."

"She would never have rested at Ashford," replied Joan from the distance of her dressing-table. "This house seems really charming, and the garden too. The drawing-room window looking through the conservatory is very pretty and the gallery is delightful. As for the study, it might be the crow's-nest again. We may live quite contentedly here, I think, and give up all idea of flight to Ashleigh Dingle."

"How long will *you* live contentedly here, Joan? What is Mr. Godfrey's best news?"

Joan came into her godmother's room with her wavy hair loose and flowing below her waist. The old lady was resting in her easy chair, with her Bible and lamp on a table beside her, and looked up a little astonished at the dishevelled

apparition of her *protégée*. Joan was as grave as moonlight under the shadow of her long locks, and she came and knelt down at Mrs. Paget's footstool before she answered the question about her lover.

"His best news is that the world is using him very well," then said she. "As for our affairs, they are where they were. He would take me at all risks, but I will not—it would be too selfish, and he is so generous."

The old lady sighed for disappointment. "My dear," said she, "I wish you may not be preparing for both a life-long regret. If you followed my advice, you would marry and accept the consequences, since he is willing."

Joan studied some minutes in silence; then she said: "If it were never to be—if we never do marry? I am half inclined to fancy we never shall—then what will become of me?"

"Don't indulge such perverse fancies, child, I will not hear them!" exclaimed her godmother, kissing her fondly. "I dreamed myself miserable in that way before I married Caleb's father,

yet here I am, Caleb's mother;" and the old lady sighed for the love of her youth who was gone, while Joan plaited a frill with her fingers meditatively, and gazed into the fire until the tears obscured it. Suddenly they began to roll down her cheeks—great tears like a child's.

"This is foolish, Joan," remonstrated Mrs. Paget. "You have no right to distrust God yet. See what a fair life you have enjoyed hitherto. You have had no trials for which you could not seek direction on your knees, and no troubles without comfort. Be a good girl, my dear, and put away dolorous presentiments—or if you cannot, think that whatever grief is laid on you, strength to bear it will be given too. Don't weep so, my treasure, it hurts me to see you. You have not surely begun to doubt of Basil's affection?"

"Oh, no! He loves me—I know he loves me dearly; if he can live quietly without me when all things are going well with him,—as he can and does,—yet his first cry would be for me, if he were in any sorrow or disappointment; he

has told me so many a time, and I believe it. We are not only fair weather friends."

"Then was he vexed and out of tune to-day, that you must fret?" asked her godmother, stroking her burning cheek.

"No, he was cheerful enough, and he made me cheerful while he stayed. I don't know well what ails me!"

"Just a little weariness and excitement, my dear, nothing worse. You will sleep it off, and be yourself again to-morrow. When shall you see Mr. Godfrey next?"

"He is coming in the morning—he has still a week or ten days to stay in London."

"That is better than you expected is it not? Come, a truce to tears! Give me a good-night kiss, and go your way to bed. I have no forebodings but lest we oversleep ourselves, and put out the methodical Miss Elizabeth. Breakfast is punctually at nine, she reminded me twice—and those who cannot be downstairs at nine, can have a tray sent to their own rooms."

Joan dried her eyes and went her way as she

was bidden, not so very unhappy after all, her tears notwithstanding. The new home showed more agreeably than ever in the fresh morning light, and she found her way early into the conservatory where the plants were all dewy and dripping with a recent watering. She had a good half-hour to meditate amongst the flowers, which proved conducive to bright and pleasant thoughts. There was undiminished difficulty and uncertainty in the future, but she hoped time and Basil would yet prove a match for them; and that she might be kept true and steadfast in what she believed to be the right way of conduct towards him.

Any person standing on the steps of the conservatory that led down into the garden was visible to passers-by on the Mall, and it happened that as Joan came out to look at a beautiful passion-flower trained over the wall, Colonel Godfrey and his nephew went by on horseback. Basil waved his hand, and she waved hers again, then stood shading her eyes and looking after him—the prettiest picture conceivable in

a light muslin dress under the verdant arcade. The Colonel could not distinguish her face, but he noted her graceful figure and inquired who she was.

“That, sir, is my dear Joan,” replied Basil.

“Humph! And how comes she at Kensington, pray?” asked the old man sharply. His nephew gratified his curiosity, and the Colonel remarked on the information: “And is *she* why you will be so frequently engaged this week and next? You are wonderfully constant, sir—but you will go to Whinmore as you promised?”

“Yes, certainly.” And here Basil let the subject drop—it was far too obnoxious to bear jading now. The Colonel was no longer careless or sarcastic about it; he was deeply interested and angry whenever it was glanced at.

The two had ridden out to breakfast with an old Indian comrade of Colonel Godfrey's, who had his retired residence near the Mall, which Basil had contrived to traverse for a chance glimpse of Joan. To her it was a pleasure quite unexpected which sent her in blushing like the cluster of

monthly rosebuds she had fastened in her brooch. Her godmother gave her a little rallying nod and laugh, and whispered between two kisses: "Did I not tell you so? All the clouds are blown away, and there is nothing but sunshine left." She had witnessed the greeting between the lovers from her window, and took it for a good sign.

Basil Godfrey presented himself at the house towards noon, and Alice insisted on keeping him to luncheon. He was nothing loth. It gave him the opportunity of seeing Joan's surroundings, and of a private talk afterwards with her godmother. He could not fail to see that the old lady was in favour of their marriage soon at all hazards—she was sure, she said, that if they were enterprising enough, they would prosper in life.

"Though Joan brings you no fortune she will save you one, and earn her own pin-money too if need be," she added.

"My wife will have something else to do than scribble stories," replied Basil a little proudly.

"Please you, sir, to be respectful to my pen,"

cried Joan with an air of pique. "How long ago is it since you scribbled stories? I will not have my craft despised. I shall probably write in intervals of feeding the chickens."

"What does the child mean?—feeding the chickens?" inquired her godmother perplexed. They explained about the farm in Hampshire, and their projects of ploughing and poultry-feeding if Colonel Godfrey hardened his face against them. Then the tender old lady looked pathetically at Joan, and said: "If he would see you, he would assuredly be softened."

"But he will not see me any more than if I were Medusa's head," responded Joan, whimsically resigned. "He does not give me a chance of charming him—I only wish he would!"

Basil laughed. He was not unaware of his lady-love's pretty artless arts; he had seen her use them on Squire Hubbard with excellent results; he was persuaded the Colonel would succumb too in similar circumstances. Joan was not virtuous overmuch—not set above the desire to please and the wish to be liked.

That evening Basil dined alone with his uncle by accident; two guests were to have come who failed them, and by way of conversation, the Colonel asked: "And where have you spent your afternoon, Basil? at my Lady Harbinger's, practising for the concert?"

"No, sir, I have cried off from that exhibition—it is not in my way; there are more than enough amateurs without me, and I stand excused. I have been at Kensington."

The Colonel's countenance darkened: "May I inquire when you propose to bring that affair to a conclusion?" asked he harshly. "I do not like to feel it perpetually hanging over my head like a Damocles' sword."

"To what sort of conclusion do you mean, sir," said Basil with invincible coolness.

"*Any* sort of a conclusion?"

"I have looked the thing in the face, sir, and I cannot play the rascal. I am quite sure it would not answer, either in this world or the other."

"I don't understand—how dare you take that

jibing tone with me? Have I no claim on your respect, Basil?" stammered the old man, red, perplexed, angry. "Speak plainly—what are you determined on?"

"I would marry Joan Abbott next week, but she will not," was Basil's blunt reply.

"'Pon my word, sir, you would! And why, pray, does Joan Abbott hang back?"

"Waiting your good pleasure and consent—she does not like to enter my family without welcome, and she does not care to peril my fortune as it depends on you."

"She is ambitious then? Who would have thought it! She would rather be lady at Whinmore than dame at the farm?"

"Possibly. I know she would become the place better. I doubt whether she understands a dairy or is anything of a henwife. But she has wit enough to learn if there's occasion."

"It is not a jesting subject, Basil, I am thinking very hardly of it!" exclaimed the Colonel with increasing irritation at his nephew's quiet, resolute, careless manner.

“I am sorry to hear that, sir, for, indeed, I mean to have no wife but her,” replied Basil as seriously as he could desire. “I have allowed myself to become quite dependent on you, but there is still something I cannot barter for worldly advantages. I shall not challenge you to withdraw them——”

“And what if I *do* withdraw them?” cried the Colonel furious.

“I have no plans except such as your liberality sketched for me three years ago—Joan talks of the backwoods of America; she has thriving kinsfolk there, and she knows I am happy in a vagrant life.”

If Basil had thrown a glass of cold water in his uncle’s face the old man could not have been more taken aback, more suddenly reduced to breathless silence. After a considerable pause, he began to speak again in a high, tremulous voice, defending himself who was never accused save by his own conscience. “When have I threatened to withdraw anything from you?—who is there on earth for me to help and care for besides you? What

do I ask in return for my benefits? Only that you will not bring a low-born woman to sit as mistress at my fireside until I am gone."

"The low-born woman is the woman I love," said Basil; "I cannot change, and would not if I could. Nor can I say, like the prodigal son, 'Give me the portion that belongs to me;' for all I have is by grace and not by right, and you do not want me to go away, nor I to go. Yet I must consider her—she says me 'Nay' now for my own sake only, and I cannot honourably delay much longer to fulfil my promise. We wait a good word from you, sir, and that alone. If you would consent to see her, I am convinced your objections would vanish."

"They would *not*, Basil! I have altogether different designs for you; and you must throw the world away for a beautiful face! Not the first time men have done that, and repented too late."

Basil was dumb, and tired of the argument, which always ended in the same vexatious knot.

Colonel Godfrey had made up his mind against Joan, and would not unmake it for all that tongue could say; but he *would* keep terms with Basil, and never flagged in his generous kindnesses, shrewdly aware that by each one he was increasing the dissuasive motives the young man must feel restraining him from the final act of defiance and independence which would oblige his uncle either to cast him off or to receive Joan Abbott.

It was well for Basil, well for both, that Joan was not impetuous, not self-seeking. She had vowed in her heart that she would not blame him whatever happened, and she found her comfort at this period in the conviction that he still loved her perfectly, though he was less eager in appearance than a year ago. She became aware of new doubts and fears passing between Mrs. Franklyn and her godmother, and she knew that her affairs were talked threadbare in many a family conclave; but outwardly she would know nothing but that Basil was good, considerate, kind, and very much at her service several hours daily, whether she wished to see the lions of London, or only to walk

about the green glades of Kensington, which she thought as beautiful as any woodland in the country. And Basil was, in fact, all and more than all her fond imagination painted him.

LXVI.

THE LOVE THAT IS HARD BY HATE.

ONE morning Basil Godfrey brought to the house on the Mall half a dozen tickets for who would to go to that amateur concert, under Lady Harbinger's patronage, to which the Colonel had alluded; and Joan Abbott being of the party, he sat by her through three hours of music, of which he hardly heard a note.

But Joan enjoyed it exceedingly, and especially she enjoyed two songs in which sang Emmot Torre. The concert was one of those got up for a charitable purpose, in which the services of minor professional persons, anxious to be brought into notice, were accepted. Emmot's singing-mistress was one of these, and by her recommendation Emmot had obtained the oppor-

tunity for display that she was eager after. Her voice was lovely, her face and figure were boldly beautiful as ever, and she was vociferously applauded as well by those who knew her as by those who did not. Basil Godfrey, explaining to Mr. Paget whose song it was that excited such enthusiasm, added that Emmot was training for a public performer.

In the highest moment of her triumph the enchantress met the full gaze of Joan Abbott's sweet, calm eyes, and then she saw in whose company Joan was. Emmot had not encountered Basil Godfrey since the night of the election-ball at Standen, but she had heard of him often, and his most private affairs were now no secrets to her. She knew all about his constant, romantic attachment to Joan, and Colonel Godfrey's long opposition and increasing anger; but nevertheless when she saw the lovers seated together, she underwent a great qualm of heart, and for the rest of the entertainment was quite indifferent whether the audience applauded or hissed her—if so polite a company could hiss.

Perhaps she felt at that instant the nothingness of a selfish life, and that whatever her successes elsewhere, here it was a failure, utter and humiliating. No one, however, read her mortification in her face. She had begun to learn the art of necessary disguises, and coming in contact with Mr. Godfrey, when the crowd began to move, she spoke to him pleasantly, as any woman might do to a casual acquaintance. Basil responded in the same tone, but had an air of screening Joan from her observation. Her shrewdness penetrated his feelings and her malice defeated it. She looked at Joan with her most beguiling air, and said :

“ We are country-women, and should know each other, I think.”

Basil reddened with annoyance, but Joan, who had been touched to the heart by Emmot's singing, replied with a few words expressive of the pleasure she had received ; and Emmot answered again in her jubilant tone :

“ I shall be delighted to sing to you any day. I never sing so well as to one appreciative listener.”

Elizabeth Seamer was Emmot's escort, and she and Mrs. Caleb Paget found fifty things to say to each other, which ended in the enchantress's introduction to Alice, and her invitation to the house on the Mall. Basil Godfrey heard it with vexation, but said nothing. The blind curate was less reticent of his opinions. He remarked that amiable women were not cautious enough in making new acquaintance. Alice laughed and confessed to the accusation, adding that Emmot's talent was a vast attraction, but she would only ask her one evening with Elizabeth, and get it over, and they need not let the introduction lead to intimacy.

To this Mr. Paget replied with unusual austerity, that he would rather she were not asked even once; for she was a woman whom he never would allow to be in familiar association with his family.

Alice had a great idea of making her establishment what is called "a pleasant house," and she thought it did not do to be too particular in London. She whispered aside to Joan, "Men

are harder judges of women than women are of each other, whatever cynics may say ; ” but Joan agreed with her good master, and replied, that if there were warning in the past, Emmot Torre was not likely to prove an angel to any house that took her in ; and for her part she should prefer to keep her always outside the threshold.

Emmot was thankful now for any small opportunities of amusement or variety. She had found her residence in Wales, extended for several months after Mrs. Rigden returned to Standen, weary in the extreme. She cared nothing for the beauty of the hills, the sea, the sky. She liked to live amongst her fellow-creatures, and not amongst stocks and stones ; she wrote to her father, and pleaded earnestly to be recalled from her state of vegetation. General Vyvian was perplexed. He did not wish to have her home again for any comfort she was to himself, and his drowsy wife roused up from her habitual lethargy to declare that one roof should never again shelter her and that young lady of her husband’s family who had created

such scandal at Standen. Quiet as the Indian lady appeared, she ruled, and the General had nothing to do but to write back to Emmot that it was impossible for his wife to receive her any more. This refusal was a sensible disappointment to the enchantress, exiled from the gay world. She looked out with positive loathing at the fair landscape spread before her windows, and wrote again in a rage that she would rather beg her bread than eat it any longer in such bitterness as she had lately done. Her host was a physician whose wife took a few ladies to board—invalid ladies, or so-called, whose cases required only a strict regimen and watchfulness. Emmot hated her companions, her guardians, the servants, who were incorruptible, and at length gave so much trouble, that the General was advised by her host to remove her to a more cheerful scene. The reply to this intimation that the Welsh household was tired of her, came through General Vyvian's lawyer, and enclosed in it was a letter from Elizabeth Seamer. The lawyer made Emmot the offer of returning to

Clapham, and Elizabeth wrote that she would be welcome there, and they would do as much to promote her happiness as she would let them.

A return to Clapham, from Emmot's present point of view, looked like a return to the world. She accepted the alternative set before her, and three days later she found herself once more a member of that respectable family-circle, *minus* the Oxford tutor, and *plus* another lady of neglected education, whom the unfortunate Elizabeth was veneering with thin plates of knowledge in the usual way. Emmot could hardly believe that it was really herself whom she saw reflected in the dim recesses of the conservatory the evening after her arrival. She gazed round the room—there was Mrs. Seamer dozing, Elizabeth buried in a book, the new boarder doing crotchet-work, Mr. Seamer with one eye half open and the other half shut, trying to read the "Entomological Magazine." She laughed at the absurdity of her position—as well provide a canary-cage for a kite as this decent dulness for her! She could not rest in it even for a

week without complaining, and she laid her troubles on Elizabeth, who bore them with patient unconcern. She studied the theatrical news in the papers, and her old ambition to shine upon the stage woke up with fresh vivacity. General Vyvian was appealed to, but refused to listen to any such schemes—let her be satisfied with a private audience. He even threatened to withdraw her pension if she persisted. “Let him do it,” retorted Emmot, and hardened her face towards him. The lawyer intervened, persuaded the General to moderate his menace, or to make it only on conditions. He yielded. Emmot consented to drop his name and never to resume it, and he accorded to her means adequate for the prosecution of the studies requisite to her vocation.

Emmot was now working with all the diligence that was in her—but that was not much—not enough, her teachers warned her, not by any means enough, to ensure for her a permanent success. She however was blessed in vast self-confidence, and made light of their warn-

ings. Sufficient for her was the triumph of the day—and her triumph at the amateur concert had been decisive. The following morning she was requested to take the place at a private concert of a distinguished singer, suddenly indisposed; but even while she was congratulating herself on this honourable proposal, there came a note from Mrs. Caleb Paget to Elizabeth Seamer, inviting the two for an impromptu musical evening at the house on the Mall.

Emmot did not hesitate an instant which she would accept. “I wish the invitations were not for the same evening, but not for the world would I miss the chance of knowing Mr. Godfrey’s sweetheart!” cried she.

“She is engaged to be married to him,” replied Elizabeth.

“So she may be—but there’s many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip!” said Emmot, in a tone of prophecy.

How Mr. Paget’s wife came to act in such prompt and direct defiance of her husband’s opinion need not, perhaps, be explained at length.

In the first place, she loved her own way; in the next, she had a social conscience that would have troubled her so long as her general invitation to Elizabeth and Emmot continued unredeemed; and in the last, she wanted to give Joan Abbott a glimpse of her society before they were left alone in London by its exodus to the sea, the moors, and the Continent.

Joan would very willingly have dispensed with society at present, but when Alice told her just before dinner that she had company in the evening, she received the announcement amiably, and put on her company suit. Dear Joan, with her one best dress, and that so sober! But she was very indifferent—all the eyes in the world were nothing to her except Basil Godfrey's. She supposed he was not coming, for Alice had not named him; but, in fact, a note had been dispatched to his address, begging him to come if he could.

Alice's impromptu party took all her household by surprise. She replied to their exclamations that it was only a little music, and long prepa-

rations were nothing but trouble and expense. People did not expect much on short notice; and finally, that was her way of doing things. The Spencers were sure to turn up, and so were the Clapham party, but as for anybody else, she could not be certain. If they appeared, well and good; if not, she should not break her heart: she should have got Emmot Torre off her conscience; for, of course, as Caleb disapproved the acquaintance, she could not keep it up.

Thus Joan learnt that the enchantress of Ashleigh was chief of the expected guests, and on the impulse of the moment she inquired whether Mr. Godfrey was amongst the invited. Alice nodded, good-humouredly, "Yes," but as there had been no time for an answer since she wrote, she could not bid her expect him. "I meant it to be a pleasant surprise to you if he does come, and no disappointment if he does not, my dear," explained the married lady.

Joan hardly thanked her as so much considerateness deserved, and old Mrs. Paget drily remarked: "You would sort your company .

more discreetly, Alice, if you took your husband into your counsels."

"Miss Torre is about the last person in the world Mr. Godfrey can wish to meet," added the blind curate.

"If I had known it before!" exclaimed Alice. "But it cannot be helped—they must take their chance. They are not likely to make a scene in my drawing-room. If they are, here is Joan to keep the peace."

No one vouchsafed any reply to this nonsense; and Joan for once found herself wishing Basil might keep away.

But he came,—everybody came who was asked. And first the enchantress with the serious Elizabeth. In selecting her songs, Emmot had said that she was going to sing only for Joan Abbott, whereupon Elizabeth inquired for whom she had dressed. Emmot laughed mischievously, indicated the famous brazen butterfly in the tulle puffery of her stomacher, and said: "For *him*, and every one else who has eyes to admire me."

She did not need much art to make her

beautiful, but she had put forth all at her command, and she knew that her efforts were triumphant. When she entered Alice's pretty drawing-room, she had the air of a goddess, bright, proud, imperial. Old Mrs. Paget gazed with wonder at her—and then wondered at nothing men had done or might do for her. Joan Abbott sat still, absolutely forgetting to greet her, seeking her parallels in mythological story, only returning to a collected observation of her, when Emmot whispered with an assumption of confidence: “I have chosen all my songs for *you*—I shall sing only for *you* to-night.”

Joan caught her breath and said something, not well knowing what, and Emmot took a seat by her, and began to talk. The other ladies clustered in a group by the conservatory door, out of earshot, comparing them, criticizing them, agreeing finally that sumptuous as was the fair Emmot, Joan's countenance was lovelier by far; for in both appeared the impression of the soul, and the one was good and gracious, the other full of guile and the powers of evil.

"We two have come to great promotion, have we not? Who could have predicted it five years ago?" said Emmot, and sighed sentimentally, looking in Joan's face.

Joan coloured, and answered her with unconscious curtness: "Why do you say '*we two*'? Our starting-point, our course and our goal are none of them the same."

"Is it christian to taunt me with my beginning? it was not my choice. And as for my goal, it is not much of my choice either. I suppose you are of Rosalind's mind, and thank Heaven fasting for a good man's love? O, you are very virtuous—I *know*. You would strain at a gnat, and I have swallowed a string of camels! So you have your reward, and I have lost—the most coveted treasure a woman can lose!" Emmot's voice had a tremulous thrill in it, her blue eyes swam, but Joan's sensitive honest nature was proof against these signs of emotion, as an *expert* is against a forged signature. She made no reply, but gazed straight before her with a visage calm as fate, and only not con-

temptuous. Emmot understood her sentiments without words, and in her pique and annoyance let fall her mask of pathos. "You are proud of your luck, and wonderful luck it is—so wonderful one doubts of its ever coming true;" she re-commenced. "Are you not afraid, now and then, you may miss it? You would be, if you knew Basil Godfrey as well as I know him. O, he is a prince of dissemblers! See this bit of tinsel—" (showing the butterfly brooch)—"it was his gift to me in the days when I thought such a sham beautiful. I wear it—I'll be buried in it for his sake! You think you have all his heart—the list of his conquests, if I could recite them, would be as long as Leporello's to Don Juan."

"I don't believe you," replied Joan concisely, and rising from her chair with a quiet dignity that silenced and abashed Emmot, she invited Alice, who had drawn near, to take her place, and crossed the room to her blind master.

The enchantress was very much disconcerted by Joan's very plain speaking, and her temper

for the evening was spoilt. All the small envy, jealousy, hatred and malice of her nature woke up like a nest of adders ready to sting. Elizabeth Seamer perceived that she was dangerous, and tried to soothe her. Apparently she was soothed, and her face grew clear again at the entrance of the next guests. These were the Spencers; but it was a decidedly painful surprise to all but Emmot when Aunt Amelia and her charming girls came in escorted, not by Uncle Welby, but by Cousin Gerrard. Aunt Amelia was literally appalled at the view of Emmot; the smiles froze on her jocund countenance, and hardly could she utter her apologies for fright and confusion. But old Mrs. Paget ran to the rescue, took possession of her friend Gerrard, and invited him to give her all the news of Whorlstone. She conveyed him to her son's retired nook, and engaged him in their disjointed chat; and together they kept the poor, nervous lover in play until the room was nearly full, and only Basil Godfrey was wanting to make Alice's invitation list complete. Then Gerrard

escaped them, and when Mrs. Paget caught sight of him again, he was leaning on the back of the couch where Emmot sat—a singed moth drawn once more within the radius of the fatal flame that had martyred him so cruelly before.

Emmot was prattling in her light, heedless way as if she had no recollection of the past, while he answered her hurriedly, confusedly, like a man whose wits are scattered by a glad surprise. He was red and white by turns, a cold moisture stood on his forehead, his upper lip, and a wild, unsteady light glittered in his eyes. Blanche whispered to Belle: “I wish we could get Gerrard away from her;” and Belle whispered back: “There is no chance of it—she is making a dead-set at him, the wicked woman!”

“Something has vexed her, and when she is angry, she is full of mischief,” Elizabeth Seamer confided to Alice. “She does not care whom she injures, so that she vents her own wrath. It is a most disastrous accident, her coming

across poor Gerrard Spencer again ! Try to get her to the piano."

Alice opened the instrument, and invited the enchantress to sing. At first she excused herself, but at a plea from Gerrard she consented, and gave him her hand with an air of witchery to lead her to her place. Sweetly she bade him turn her leaves, adding that he would remember at what note she liked to have them turned. Gerrard, hardly knowing what he did, set a song on the desk before her. She purled the tune for a minute softly, and ran her fingers over the keys, then, shutting up the piece, said, in an audible aside : " No, I'll sing you a better song than that without a book—one you have not heard before."

While this better song was in progress Basil Godfrey entered unobserved, and witnessed the pantomime of Emmot's performance. The luckless Gerrard seemed exalted out of himself as he listened. If she had known the worth of a true heart, she sang, Never, never, never would she have cast it away. She had been

deceived, deceived ; she had given all her love for naught, and had cast true love away, away ! The sorrow in her voice would almost have moved a stone, and Gerrard had quite lost his mastery of himself as its sad echoes of self-reproach and regret sank into silence. The tears were rolling down his face, his mouth quivered convulsively, and with a sharp hysterical cry, he turned round, and slunk into the conservatory.

“ What is the matter ? ” inquired Emmot innocently, but Basil noticed that her hands were not very steady as she arranged another song before her. She had just discovered his presence, and it was a mixed surprise. No one answered her inquiry, which was not addressed to anybody in particular, but Mrs. Caleb Paget bade her go on singing, and she did as she was bidden—the easiest thing to do.

This song was one of those selected for Joan Abbott. It was a ballad all about a lovely village maid wooed by a stranger-lord

and left forsaken. Joan coloured at the first verse, smiled at the second, at the third stood up beside Basil, who drew her hand through his arm, and laid his own hand on it—and so Emmot saw them standing when she looked round to ask how Joan liked it.

“It is a very good song and very well sung—there is no false sentiment about it,” said Joan good-humouredly, though there was a rosy confusion in her face too.

Emmot sang on without more inviting, and charmingly, indeed, she sang—now a ballad, now a love-lyric, but all with some echo of a lowly heart wooed and won and broken. Basil and Joan heard the sound but lost the sense presently in sweeter converse of their own—they were dart-proof in their mutual confidence.

Not so poor Gerrard Spencer. Discreet people made no sign of seeing his peculiarity of behaviour, but Aunt Amelia followed him into his retreat, and was urging him to go home quietly, and leave her and the girls to follow.

“If we all go it will make such a fuss,” said

she. "You can get out on the Mall by the garden—I wish you would, Gerrard. You are not fit to return into the drawing-room—and that mischievous woman there. I do think she is possessed by a spirit of evil."

Gerrard groaned and delivered himself of some expressions that horrified Aunt Amelia. Basil Godfrey's name recurred several times in his incoherent rage, and she inquired in amazement what Basil had to do with his misery.

"Everything," shrieked Gerrard, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

The conservatory-door into the drawing-room was gently closed, and a few minutes after, by that at the other end, opening upon the steps into the garden, the blind curate and Basil Godfrey appeared upon the scene. Mr. Paget began to speak in a pacifying tone to the unhappy young man, and Gerrard lifted his head from his hands, and stared at him with glaring, blood-shot eyes. Suddenly he caught sight of Basil, and made as if he would have struck him, but Aunt Amelia, with a courage that always

amazed her to reflect on afterwards, thrust herself between them, and held him back. Gerrard offered her no resistance when she took his arm, and led him into the air; rage, shame, and confused remembrance were struggling together in his excitable brain, but he seemed to have forgotten the near vicinity of his enchantress, and he allowed himself to be carried off in a cab by Aunt Amelia without another word.

When Blanche and Belle heard that their mother was gone, they would follow, and took Basil Godfrey for their escort. On their way home they told him that Cousin Gerrard had not been well at St. Giles' lately, and he had come up to London for a change. They were going to Brighton for a month, and wanted to carry him with them, and keep him over the weddings, but papa demurred—in fact, he had been very odd and irritable, and they were afraid to-night's excitement would end in another of his attacks.

Their fears were but too well founded. All that night Gerrard laughed and shrieked, and

prated in fury, keeping his uncle's house awake for terror, and the next day he was conveyed to the establishment of the physician, in whose charge it had been necessary to place him before.

Elizabeth Seamer announced the fact to Emmot the same afternoon, from a letter Aunt Amelia had dispatched to Clapham, breathing all the indignation and sorrow of a warm-hearted woman. Emmot, who was seated at the piano at the moment, glanced over her shoulder with a grin that made Elizabeth cry out, "How *ugly* you look, Emmot! What wicked imp has taken hold of you now?"

"I was wishing it was somebody else, and not that poor, soft fool, Gerrard," responded the enchantress, bitterly. "Did you see how he would not bid me good-bye last night—how he would not take my hand? If you did not, everybody else did—Joan Abbott did, and she bowed me off like the plague too."

"Are you talking of Mr. Basil Godfrey?"

"Of whom else should I be talking?"

“You profess to love him, and you wish he were gone mad! That is just like you. Your love is hard by hate.”

“True, O wise Elizabeth! ‘I love his beauty passing well but I hate him with the hate of hell, O Basil fair to see!’” sang Emmot, darting her hand over the keys in a parody of both music and words.

Elizabeth kindled up into as hot anger as she was capable of, and exclaimed: “You heartless sham! Neither your love nor your hate will ever spoil your appetite for dinner! I am sick of you! I wish you would transfer your graces and your devilries to another sphere. I’d rather have to do with the dullest wit on earth than with you, for I believe you have a thoroughly bad nature!”

Emmot turned about on the music-stool, and faced her monitress fiercely: “And who gave it me if I have? God made us all, says the Catechism, so I suppose he made you indifferent, and Joan pious, and me cynical. What new sphere do you recommend? If I saw my way

to one that promised well, I'd go to-morrow; you are far too good for me here, but whither shall I go? That crazy, conceited braggart who fell in love with me at Standen last year, is out of prison again, and renews his offer to make me most extremely happy if I will entrust my fate to him. I have a letter to that purpose in my desk upstairs, that came three days ago. Shall I jump at his beautiful proposal? He has found me out here, and seems to be the only person in the world who cares for me."

"You have more wit than to throw yourself away on him, so I need give you no advice," said Elizabeth.

Emmot laughed. "You are right there, but it is a temptation in its way. I prefer any sort of liking to none. If I might walk with him in silk attire, an' siller ha' to spare, then I'd accept his hand; but since he's poor, I shall just let him know that my heart it is another's, and never can be his!" Half sighing, half singing, Emmot spun round again on her stool, and went on with her study of the piece Elizabeth

had interrupted to tell her of Gerrard Spencer's relapse, and Elizabeth muttered to herself that even the crazy barber had a lucky escape of her.

LXVII.

ON THE LONE MOOR.

JOAN ABBOTT had had just taste enough of the pleasures of the town to whet her appetite, and no more, when Parliament broke up, and Basil Godfrey left London with his kinsman for Whinmore.

They had been gone down to Yorkshire barely a week when, about six o'clock on the Saturday evening after their departure, a telegraphic message was brought to the house on the Mall, addressed to Joan Abbott; "Come to Whinmore without delay: you are wanted;" and the sender was Colonel Godfrey.

Joan was alone in the drawing-room with Mrs. Paget when the envelope was delivered to her. She turned very pale and rose from her chair,

reading the enclosure aloud. The servant asked her to sign the receipt, and she did it mechanically; then said, looking at her godmother, "I must go."

"Surely, surely," replied the old lady, herself much shaken, but trying to dissemble it. "The night mail leaves at a quarter to ten; come, my dear, let me help you to get ready. It is for no good cause you are summoned in this way."

Joan did not speak but went as she was bidden, and with quick, exact movements laid out some changes of clothing, which Miss Elizabeth packed in her portmanteau. Mr. Paget, who had been told what was doing, came to the door with a grieved countenance, and then Alice to call them all to dinner, which was waiting. There was plenty of time for everything that could be done, and time to wait afterwards, and every one but Joan talked low and interruptedly in useless speculation on the reasons why she was wanted. As for her, she knew that something terrible must have befallen Basil, and she was

only restless to be gone to him. Mrs. Paget and her son said a few words aside about the impropriety of letting her travel alone by night, but she overheard them, and dreading any hindrance said quickly, "Do not be distressed for me. I shall do very well alone."

Alice accompanied her to the Great Northern Station, and with a special recommendation of her to the care of the guard, saw her off on her anxious journey. Six hours of flying through moonlit, unreaped fields, by sleeping villages and silent towns, brought the train to Norminster in the clear rosy dawn. On the platform, waiting with the few officials, was an old man in the Whinmore livery, and with him a respectable woman who had just come out of the station hotel. As the guard opened the door of Joan's carriage, they met her. She was composed but extremely pale and faint.

"We are ready for you, ma'am," said the woman. "You cannot get on to Standen until the nine o'clock train, and a rest in bed will do you good. Colonel Godfrey sent James over

last night late, in hopes you might come by the mail. The old gentleman and his nephew always use our house."

"What is amiss?" Joan asked of the man, who stood with his hat off, regarding her with solemn curiosity.

"The young Squire have had a serious accident, ma'am. We don't know for sure, but we expect it was Turtell attacked him, as attacked him before," was the answer.

There was no need to inquire further. Joan followed her conductress into the hotel, and passively submitted to her assiduities, not inviting any conversation. It was strange how her thoughts wandered from the present, how dull her sense of pain was, how little alive to suffering her feelings get. The first shock had stunned her nerves. She lay down and was almost on the instant lost in unconsciousness. So have condemned men slept under the shadow of death.

It seemed but a moment when the same woman woke her, after several hours of deep

sleep, and she heard all the Sunday bells chiming through the city. She had scarcely time to dress and swallow a cup of tea, when she was called to the train. The Whinmore servant led her the way to a carriage in which was already seated an elderly gentleman reading a newspaper, which he laid aside at her entrance. She did not observe how much she was the object of compassionate notice and remark as she passed along the platform; indeed, she observed nothing—she moved as in a dream. The gentleman, who was a notable surgeon, also on his way to Whinmore, regarded her furtively from under his bushy brows, and then returned to his newspaper. He had expected to see quite another sort of person—a soft, ill-regulated, unfortunate young person, from a word or two Colonel Godfrey had mentioned to him; but this was a lady whose due was observance and respect. He was puzzled. He came in the way of tragedies every day, and was wont to deprecate as useless the wear-and-tear of the emotions; but he would have preferred to see tears to the sadness in Joan's dry eyes,

looking away fixedly to visions beyond the horizon.

It was a lovely morning, full of sunshine and peace, and after nearly two hours of flat country, the line ran up a beautiful district of hills, now purple of moor, then gold of waving corn, then green of luxuriant wood. But no animation of surprise or delight kindled in Joan's passive gaze, and she only spoke once to ask: "Is this Standen?" when the train slackened speed on its approach to a little town in a hollow, dominated by a grey church tower.

"It is," said the surgeon, and folding up his newspaper, quietly called her attention to himself. "A few words with you, young lady, before we reach our journey's end. I saw Mr. Godfrey last evening, and told him he had three good chances in his favour—a constitution as sound as a bell, a perfect air to recover in, and the best of reasons for wishing to live. He does not lie at the Hall, but at the keeper's lodge on the moor, and his first anxiety is for your presence. Now, my dear lady, you may be either my greatest help

or my greatest hindrance. If you are quiet and cheerful, I shall be glad of your coming, but if you are uncontrolled and cause him excitement, I shall be compelled to forbid him your company. And that you may not be startled out of yourself, I warn you that he looks like a ghost—as bloodless and wan as the dead. But he is *not* dead, and you know the adage: ‘While there is life there is hope.’”

To talk when she was oppressed was not Joan’s habit. From the surgeon’s concise way of speaking, she realized Basil’s dangerous case, and said in a low voice, she would be heedful, and would do only what she was bidden; and nothing more until, at Standen, they left the train. One of the Whinmore carriages was waiting, and as the surgeon was about to jump in after Joan he turned suddenly to a large-limbed, grave-visaged young woman who stood behind with a package in her hands, and said: “Come along, nurse, get in; we can do nothing without you;” and she took her place with her back to the horses, while the man-servant,

who had met Joan at Norminster, mounted the box.

Standen was all at prayers as the carriage rattled across the market-place, and the solemn rumble of the organ sounded through the open doors and windows of the parish church. The horses went at speed for some three miles along the high-road, then stopped at a bridle-gate where stood a groom with a rough, stout pony, waiting. Here the surgeon and the nurse left the carriage, to take a shorter track up the moor to the lodge where the patient lay. Joan wished to follow them, but the surgeon said imperatively: "Not now—by-and-bye. Take the lady forward to the Hall, and tell Colonel Godfrey I will see him after I have seen his nephew." And with that he mounted the pony and rode off, the nurse trudging after, and the groom carrying her package.

All other feelings and considerations with Joan were weighed down by the night-mare of Basil's danger, and with an absolute indifference to every other person or thing, she found herself

entering the noble old house of which the master had said, she never should enter it in his lifetime. Yet she perceived the chill of meeting no welcome. Mrs. Beste, the kind old formal housekeeper, received her with a curtsy, and a young footman who was rushing across the hall, pulled up with reverence as she was led by the grand staircase to the room that had been prepared for her; but Colonel Godfrey did not show himself, nor was any speech of courtesy made to her in his name. Mrs. Beste had assigned her a principal room, and with her own hands, rarely devoted to such uses, she took off Joan's dusty travelling dress, punctuating her attentions with little sad, condoling ejaculations and gestures. Joan thanked her gently, and when she had re-dressed herself in an old, favourite spun-silk dress, chosen because it was soft and did not rustle with movement, she was left alone in her room.

“She is very whist and white, and her heart's heavier than any of ours, but she knows what she is about,” was the housekeeper's report of her to

the Colonel, who, as at the time of his sons' deaths, had fallen ill, and shut himself up out of the way and sight of emotion, but was as miserable and forlorn in his solitude as man could be.

Yesterday morning at ten o'clock, his nephew had gone out to shoot on the moor, and about four of the afternoon, one of the keepers had found him lying in the heather, bathed in blood from frightful wounds in the neck and chest. There had been a struggle where he lay, and he had evidently been left for dead by his assailant. The keeper, however, discovered that he was not dead, but only swooning from exhaustion, and having got assistance, conveyed him to his lodge. Thither came the doctors, and did their work, and spoke oracularly; but Basil Godfrey spoke never at all, except to moan with an inexpressible anguish again and again: "Joan, Joan," whether consciously or not was doubtful, but the name was carried to Colonel Godfrey by the surgeons, with a hint that this "Joan" he cried for must come.

“And what am I to do with her, poor soul?” was his querulous rejoinder. “She will weep and break her heart. A plague on all such silly entanglements, say I!” But the end was that Joan was sent for and came.

Joan came, but Colonel Godfrey shrank from the effort of seeing her. He felt intensely pained for her, for his nephew, for himself. He hated trouble, and the depressing spectacle of suffering; he had not visited Basil even, and Dr. Ridgen told him for his comfort that it was better for both that he should stay away. He was curious about Joan, and a kind impulse stirred in his breast towards her in spite of his long prejudice, but he gave it no expression; and she, sitting in her beautiful room alone, felt desolate past utterance. Mrs. Beste served her presently with food and wine in a little boudoir adjoining, and waited on her with the most careful respect; but while the master held himself aloof, the household wondered, and then concluded that the young Squire’s sweetheart was not to his kinsman’s mind.

By-and-by came in to her the gentleman who had travelled with her from Norminster. He took her hand seriously but re-assuringly, and told her that if Mr. Godfrey was not better neither was he worse, and when he had eaten some luncheon himself, he would return with her to the lodge: "But I cannot promise that you will know my patient," he added.

The surgeon sat long at lunch, or rather, the Colonel detained him, making him tell over and over the best and worst possibilities of the case. "If he go, my heir will be a child, the son of a country-parson," said the old man woefully. "And such a career as was opening before my nephew! His loss would be as bitter to me as the loss of my sons, for I have loved him like a son. The ways of God are, indeed, inscrutable!"

It was midway the afternoon when Joan was called for, and her heart had grown sick with waiting. But the fresh air, as she was driven through the park and over the moor, revived her. To reach the lodge she and her guide,

the doctor, had to take a foot-path through the ling which went mounting up and up into the pure ether above the wold. They came on it suddenly, at last, in a dimple with its back to the bleak north. It was a little stone-built place of two rooms, thatched with reeds a foot thick, and the door stood wide open to the sweet sun and balmy breeze. The nurse sat as on watch close outside, and within, on the keeper's mattress of straw, covered with fine linen, and propped with many pillows, lay Basil Godfrey, a mask of himself, and not the living man. But Joan knew him; O, yes, she knew him!

His eyes were shut though he was not sleeping, and as the doctor's figure darkened the doorway, he looked up. Joan hung back at the last moment, but the doctor said: "Come," and with loud throbbing heart she followed him in. Basil's eyelids had drooped again, and he was not aware of her until she knelt down by him, and took his nerveless hand in both hers, then laid her cool cheek upon it, in the tenderest caressing way—almost as of a mother with a

sick child. He knew whose touch it was, and breathed her name in a scarcely articulate whisper as he looked up in her face. And then she bent over and kissed him, and he felt her tears; but he seemed suddenly cheered and happy; he had got his dear love beside him, and if any one could hold him in life or comfort him in departing, she could. He had an ardent desire to live, a great courage and spirit to endure and resist pain—but if he must go the way of all flesh now, in the meridian of his days, his good and happy days, God's will be done!

The doctor went outside again, leaving his patient and Joan for some time alone together. The keeper had rigged up a tent for himself in a sheltered crevice near, and his lad was tending a fire of sticks on an open space to boil a kettle to make some tea. The light smoke drifted and floated away, and was lost in the pale clear air, and the voices of bird and insect in the heather seemed to deepen and sanctify the sabbath stillness.

“A hermit might be envied in this exquisite

spot," said the doctor. But the needs of other patients compelled him soon to get away from it. He gave his final orders to the nurse, and then looked into the lodge again. He could not forbear a smile at what he saw—Joan still kneeling by the bed, her hand clasped in Basil's hand, and he fast asleep, all signs of agitation and distress gone from his countenance, which was white and placid and beautiful as death.

Not so Joan's; she was sorely perplexed, and afraid to move: "He does not speak to me—is he sleeping?" she asked.

"Yes,—the best compliment he could pay you under the circumstances; you have set his mind at peace, and he has given way to nature—he has not slept before since his accident. I am thankful to see him so thoroughly overcome." The doctor studied his patient's visage for a moment, and bent an ear to listen to his faint breathing. "Yes, this is satisfactory," he added; "you have proved a good anodyne, my dear young lady—You may talk to him a little when he wakes, which will not, I hope, be for several

hours, but discourage him from talking. He will not be an entertaining companion for some time to come, but if he will be prudent, with God's blessing, he may be almost his own man again in three months."

Leaving this hopeful comfort behind him, the doctor went away, and Basil's hold on Joan's fingers presently relaxing in the depth of his repose, she drew them from him, and changed her position. He noticed nothing, felt nothing—did not even feel the soft pressure of her lips on his forehead when her gentle hand had shed the ruffled hair from it. He appeared as if he might lie unconscious until he passed into the sleep that knows no waking. She stood looking on him until she saw him in imagination as dead, and then her eyes filled and overflowed with long suppressed, passionate tears. All their long love and faith and constancy was come to this!

The nurse, who was sitting in the doorway with a large-printed Bible on her lap, heard her weeping and gave her a word of kindness and exhortation. "He is doing well while he is

sleeping," said she, "and you would be wise, dear lady, if you rested too. He will have to suffer above a bit presently, and then his spirits will sink, and your work will be set to comfort him. He seems a sweet-tempered gentleman, but when he is on the mend, he'll turn fractious—for all the world like a bairn. And that's the beauty of men,—we should never be able to manage 'um at all when they're ailing, if they didn't forget what masters they are when they're well, and look to us as if we were their mothers."

Joan smiled sadly through her tears, and came and sat in the lodge door with the nurse, who then returned to the study of her book, leaving the lady to her meditations. The hushed calm of the sabbath evening compassed them. For miles and miles away spread the heather, glowing red in the now sinking sun. The keeper and another man were smoking their pipes at some distance to windward beyond the tent, but besides them there was no living thing in sight.

Joan could not *think*, there was no continuity in her reverie, but scene after scene out of the

past floated before her like visions. Now it was the glorious May morning when she was hanging her garlands from the lattice, and Basil came by, looked up and straight they fell in love. Then it was evening in the water-meads, and he was coming up through the dusk to the cattle-bridge, and telling her that she had waited, and he had lost his way that they might meet. Now they were going down the stepping-stones to the beck at Dethick-Lea, and now they were with the children in Whorlstone Delve where the lilies grew. Then they were in that pleasant wood of Rhine-land where they first told their love, and the shadow of Goldenhair swooped down between them—and a shadow to separate them the innocent, unconscious child had been ever since, for the perverse fancy that an old man had to see her in some far future Basil's wife. Then they were in that garden by the lake of Geneva, and Joan remembered Basil's wrath, and her shame and keen remorse that she had wronged his nobleness by an unworthy doubt—

Then suddenly she rose and ran in and knelt

by him, and poured forth a silent passion of prayer for forgiveness. How often had that disloyal doubt returned upon her, and had never been confessed? Only God and her own heart knew! She bowed her face down upon his breast, and woke him with the sound of her weeping.

“Is this you, Joan, my darling, my comfort?” said he faintly, and she lifted herself up frightened at what she had done.

“Oh, Basil, if I could be a comfort to you, I would give my life to do you good!” sobbed she.

The nurse entered calm and serene: “But you are doing him harm and yourself too, my dear lady, just now,” said she.

“No, no, you could never do me harm, my love,” whispered Basil. “Don’t leave me, Joan.”

“I will not leave you, dearest—but I have roused you, and you were better sleeping.”

“I shall soon sleep again if I know you are there. Hope and pray that God will not part us, my darling.”

Joan did not answer, her face was hidden.

The nurse stood by, quiet and contemplative, until she thought her patient was slumbering again, and the lady might be trusted not to disturb him any more, and then she went out into the twilight and saw good Mrs. Beste, and Gibbs, the Colonel's valet, coming up the path to the lodge. The housekeeper's mission was to escort Joan to the Hall, but the nurse assured her that the young lady would never go—that she would watch all night by her lover: “And if the Lord takes one, He may take both,” added she, “for tenderer affection I never saw,—no not even in a wedded wife to her husband of many years! And that's saying a great deal.”

“And I've had my terrible pull up-hill for nothing,” groaned Mrs. Beste, who was stout: “I should like to see the young lady before I go back, if only for respect, nurse.”

The nurse, however, refused admission into the lodge to any more visitors, and reiterated her refusal even when the Colonel was quoted as feeling anxious to know exactly how his nephew looked. “He will look none the better to-morrow

for all the world coming to look at him to-day," said she, "and Dr. Williams and Dr. Rigden both, they gave me strict charge to keep folks away, and it is my duty to mind the doctors. Leave him to Brigham and me and that lady; if he's to live, he'll have the more chance for being let alone, and if he's to die, he wants none of us but her. Don't let us starve up here, that's all. Brigham's lad can boil the kettle, but that is about the most we can do."

"You shall not starve, I'll promise you that—but I am much concerned for the young lady; it is hardly fit she should stay here all night. Mr. Gibbs came to stay."

"Then Mr. Gibbs may go back again—the young lady is one who won't ask you or me what's fit and what's not fit. The poor gentleman begged her not to leave him, and I'm quite sure she won't. If Mr. Gibbs will look up again in the morning, I can make him of use, but at present, I'd rather have his room than his company."

Mr. Gibbs made the plain-spoken nurse a bow, gave up to her a small basket he had brought, and

then sauntered over to the spot where Brigham, the keeper, and his companion were still smoking their peaceful pipes. Mrs. Beste and the nurse, meanwhile, improved their acquaintance over the contents of the basket, a delicate portion of its stores being first set aside for Joan, if she was pleased to eat it. She would take, however, nothing but a piece of bread and a draught of water, and Mrs. Beste, more 'concerned' for her than before, went away shaking her head and protesting that she should have felt much better pleased if the young lady would have gone to the Hall, and had a good night's rest, instead of sitting up where she was not absolutely wanted; for she was sure Mr. Basil would not desire it if he was himself, and a sick man's fancies were not to be humoured to the unnecessary laying up of other people.

"Folks have to live as long as me to learn that there is trouble and work enough in the world without *making* 'em out of nothing," concluded she. "But young 'uns are always for doing and suffering more than needs, to show their love."

“ But it’s a comfort to the feelings, Mrs. Beste, and the feelings is very strong often when the body’s weakest. I don’t like over much reasonableness myself,” rejoined the nurse.

“ You’ve not got hardened to your trade yet, that’s easy to see ! ” ejaculated the housekeeper with much pathos.

“ And the Lord grant I never may ! ” piously rejoined the nurse.

Mr. Gibbs remained for some time with the keeper talking over the tragical event which had brought the young squire down to the primitive strata of human life. The valet had the luxurious whimsies of his tribe, and seemed to pity Mr. Godfrey infinitely more for having to lie in the lodge on the moor than for what he might have to suffer there.

“ And here, I suppose, he must lie, tho’ he were a prince, until the wounds close past risk of bursting out again—it may be as long as a month or even longer, poor fellow ! ”

The keeper insinuated that the young Squire was hardier than the old valet, and would not

much heed where he lay, so that he was well cared for. "And I'll back myself for tending him against any o' you fine flunkies down at the Hall," said he. "And what a sweet air's up here—that's half the battle, as Dr. Rigden said when I was helping of him on Saturday: 'Sweet air,' says he, 'is golden ointment for cuts', and so 'tis. And that other doctor, he said 'same.'"

The dew began to fall and the moon to rise, and Mrs. Beste to wish for her easy-chair and her supper. Mr. Gibbs rejoined her and they waddled down the hill together discoursing on the many changes they two had seen at Whinmore since their service began, and the many more they appeared likely to see before it ended.

LXVIII.

CONCILIATION.

GOOD Mrs. Beste had reason to shake her head and to protest many times how "concerned" she was for Joan Abbott before another Sunday came round. Sometimes the housekeeper thought she *must* speak to the young lady herself, but courage or the opportunity failed her. She did not like to distress the Colonel by telling him what weighed on her mind ; for the Colonel still professed to be ill, and kept to his own quarters ; but, at last, her burthen was too much for her, and she reluctantly laid it on her master.

"Miss Abbott, sir, is not a lady that a servant can take the liberty to speak to, but she ought to be spoke to by some one. This is now the sixth

day since she came to Whinmore, and she has never slept in a bed, and nothing but bread and water has passed her lips."

The Colonel blushed as he had never blushed since his beard was grown. "You don't say so?" stammered he.

"Yes, sir, I do say so, and I feel the shame of it, as belonging to the house. We've tried to tempt her, taking no notice, but she just tells me she drinks no wine, and does not care for dainties. But I know better—young ladies have all a sweet tooth. She has had no welcome, that's where it is, sir, and she will not be beholden to us for anything she can help. She sits with Mr. Basil of nights, because then he is most wakeful and restless; and in the day-time, when the dew is dried off the grass, she wraps herself in his plaid, and sleeps for hours in the heather. And she is getting burnt as brown as a gipsy, hands and face and neck too. This is not the thing to go on, sir; and if it should come rain, she might catch her death."

Colonel Godfrey felt horribly annoyed—more

annoyed than he could express. Gibbs had told him daily and many times a day, how cheering, patient and tender Joan was with his nephew, whose spirits now sometimes fell as low as his pulse. The tale of her devotion had got abroad, and was mentioned in the letters of inquiry and condolence he received. Dr. Williams called her a sweet and admirable young woman, and Dr. Rigden commended her with tears in his eyes. He was stung with compunction too, yet he said to himself resentfully: "It is ridiculous pride! That class of persons are accustomed to lie hard and fare meanly. It will do her no harm." He was so far right that it had done Joan no harm, but he had not spoken his sentiments aloud, and Mrs. Beste waited for an answer. At last he said, that he would try to walk as far as the lodge to consult his nephew on the matter.

"Oh, sir, but it would ^grieve Mr. Basil as never was to hear how she'd been neglected," remonstrated the housekeeper. "He just worships the ground she goes on, and he ought not to be told anything that could vex or excite him. His life

hangs by a hair, and but for her keeping up his heart, it would have been gone afore now. Could you not frame to dine downstairs to-day, sir, and ask her to dine with you—making as if you had not been able before ? ”

“ I have not been able, Mrs. Beste,” replied the Colonel, excessively bothered.

“ No, sir, but a little air and cheerful change would do you good—don’t you feel, sir, that it might ? ”

“ Mrs. Beste, don’t *you* try to wheedle me. Dr. Rigden has been at that this morning, and Gibbs too.”

“ Then, sir, there is the less need I should put in my word ; for Dr. Rigden knows your constitution, and Gibbs is of opinion that it is society you want more than physic. Mr. Basil’s accident was a awful shock, but we may hope to see him well again, and whether or no, sir, your moping won’t help him, nor that dear young lady’s starving.”

The Colonel looked out of the window as if consulting the weather—in reality consulting his own perplexed feelings. He could not for shame

let that continue which he had heard of, but he hated the notion of meeting Joan Abbott almost worse than ever. Of course, she was aware of his disapprobation ; of course, she knew him to be the sole obstacle between Basil and herself. If she had been a little sentimental butterfly of a woman, he would have faced her with courage ; but he had an alarming idea of Joan as a highly cultivated, serious, superior person, who would treat him to lofty airs of indignation—or worse still, to patronizing airs of forgiveness. Yet inevitably something must be done. He had written for Lady Marian Wallace, but she had not been able to come to him ; he thought he would write again, or he would send for Mrs. Hobbes or for Almeria.

Mrs. Beste, standing by the door, coughed to intimate that she was still waiting her orders. The Colonel glanced sharply round, muttering that it was very hard a man could not be let alone in his own house ; he wished she would leave him at peace. The housekeeper held her ground demurely respectful, and after a few

minutes' further consideration, her master said he would have the pony-carriage at five o'clock, and go up to the lodge.

"And you will bring back Miss Abbott, Sir, and dine on your return?" persisted Mrs. Beste.

"Confound the woman!" cried the old soldier, worried out of all patience. "Don't I dine every day? How should I know what Miss Abbott may be pleased to do? Put a pic-nic basket into the carriage, and tell James to go with it—perhaps I may stay there till dusk and dine with my nephew." Mrs. Beste had vanished almost before the words were out of her master's mouth, and she informed Gibbs that her opinion was the Colonel would come to now, if the young lady would only forget her pride and meet him half way.

The difficulties of his adventure disappeared from the old man's mental vision when he set out upon it. The air braced him, and he felt a philosophic inclination to make the best of what he could not hinder. Of course, they would have to marry now—it was of no use fighting

against it any longer; and, of course, he could not quarrel with his nephew, just escaping out of the jaws of death. It was a foolish, romantic caprice of love which he should always regret, but, as he could not conquer it, he had better submit with a grace, and not give ill-natured people occasion to talk. He was glad he had come out; he experienced already a good effect from the effort.

At this point of his cogitation he came in view of the lodge. The nurse was sitting at some white work a few paces from the open door, and a perfect calm and stillness reigned around. The woman espied the Colonel approaching, but did not stir—he was a stranger to her, and might be anybody, though she had a shrewd guess who he was; and so he came to the door, and looked in without warning on the faithful lovers.

Joan was writing at the keeper's rough deal table, her back to the entrance and her face to Basil, who was dictating what she wrote. He spoke in a languid, low voice, and his counte-

nance, though living again, was white with exhaustion and pain—a contrast, indeed, to the countenance that Joan turned suddenly upon the intruder, grave but full of animation, health, and colour, and without any signs of her long fast and vigil. Basil cried, faintly: “Ah, my dear uncle, you are able to get out again!” and gave the old man his hand, and as the Colonel stood gazing at him with dim eyes of compassion, the tears came into his own. There was no other word spoken for several minutes, and Joan sat trembling, with her face averted to the tiny window sunk in the wall, which framed a lovely picture of distant hills and clouds.

The two gentlemen glanced at her simultaneously, and Basil, still holding his kinsman's hand, said: “This is Joan, my treasure. What a blessing for me that she is something else besides a fine lady!”

Joan looked round at her name, and the Colonel, coming over to her, said: “We must be friends, and forgive each other, then, for his sake:”—the only formal words of conciliation

that ever passed between them ; for Joan's mouth quivered so that she could not speak, and the moment past, the occasion was past. No one who saw them together afterwards ever imagined or believed the long disapproval the Colonel had entertained of his nephew's choice. From the first hour of their meeting he always treated her, talked to her, and thought of her as a woman whom he heartily liked and admired ; and Joan, incapable of bearing malice, took to him as kindly as a daughter.

James had to report to Mrs. Beste, on his return, that the master and the young lady had broken bread together in perfect good-fellowship at last, but that the young lady had not shown herself as famished as might have been expected. Joan, indeed, betrayed no recollection of the week of meagre days she had voluntarily undergone ; perhaps there was in her mind a desire to forget it—a present sense of shame about the pride which, to prove her indifference to the luxuries of wealth, had decoyed her into the way of inflicting a great mortification on her re-

pentant host, if he should ever discover it. But the Colonel was discreet enough to keep close counsel on what Mrs. Beste had revealed to him, and thus to spare both himself and her some confusion which was well avoided; and when they said, "Good night!" at the lodge-door (for Basil did not take his uncle's hint to give Joan her *congé*, nor did Joan manifest any wish that he should), they said it in amity and comfort, and on the morrow they met again in peace.

Colonel Godfrey gained most by the scene of conciliation, in which he had borne so wise a part. He came and went about his own house freely again, and retired no more into his nervous seclusion. He received the visits of friends and neighbours, and took his daily ride, and was once more himself. But the prolonged anxiety of his nephew's condition was still for many weeks a tedious trial to him. Often he dreaded that Basil, with all his youth and constitution, would not pull through. Then he sank into despondency, and talked by the hour to Joan Abbott, who kept her own heart-ache still if she

might by any means alleviate his. But her pillow was often wet with hidden tears. She did not believe it was written amongst the secret things of God that Basil would be taken from her, but it was often hard to watch his suffering face and believe that he was long for this world. Not seldom he feared for himself too, and then, but for the strength she sought on her knees, her own confidence must have failed. This was Basil's first acquaintance with the physical anguish flesh is heir to, and his great spirit and sanguine temper by degrees declined under it so far that he fretted like a child at times. And then Joan comforted him like a child, and amused him and cheered him as no one else could—and went away afterwards to cry and pray like a child herself. He used to fancy that life might be spared to him, but shorn of vigour, and beauty, and joy, and he would rather welcome death than that, but for Joan's sake. One day he expressed this dread to Dr. Williams, who laughed at him, and promised him he would be none the worse man, bodily or spiritually, a year hence for

having been so roughly taught that he was mortal. Though the inevitable recurrences of pain and fever were alarming to his friends and distressing to himself, the vital tide had never ebbed again so far as at first, and to initiated eyes it was rising perceptibly day by day and week by week.

Towards the month's end the kind surgeon pointed this out to Joan, whom he detected studying his face as watchers of the sick do study the faces of those whose words are oracles. "Remember where Mr. Godfrey was when you were sent for, and then consider where he is now. How many paces is he nearer to life and further from death, do you think? He is so far safe that I shall have him moved down to the Hall in another fortnight. Already the heather is beginning to change, and the night frosts are cold on the moor by the middle of September."

Joan felt that she had received permanent consolation, but nevertheless her countenance dropt a little at this. What should she do when Basil

was moved down to the Hall? Where would her place be there, or would she have any place? His sister had written that she was coming to relieve her, and take charge of Basil herself. She would have come before, but Mervyn had had the measles, and she could not abandon him to the nurse,—her only boy! Joan had a dread of the dear, managing Nelly's arrival, and would rather not have been relieved.

That afternoon Basil opened his eyes on her sitting in the doorway, with her beautiful head bent, and her hands clasping her knees, and he had to call her twice before she answered him. She did not answer him at once, because she would not let him see that she had been weeping, but when he spoke a second time she rose and went to him. It seemed that Dr. Williams had made the same announcement to him as to her, but he had taken it in a far livelier temper. He realised it as the first milestone on the road to his perfect recovery, and had no idea of allowing his change of quarters to deprive him of his darling's tender watchfulness and care.

He had been conspiring for the last half hour in his own mind what he would do, and now he told her.

“This has been almost as good as the backwoods, Joan,” said he, with a wan smile and glance round his rough lodging, and then at the fair prospect outside. Joan followed the slow movement of his eyes and smiled too. “I shall be sorry to return to purple and fine linen, but Williams has spoken, and now let me speak,” he went on. “Give me those hands brown with the sun—my lady must wear gloves,” and he kissed the slender fingers she abandoned to him, and paused a minute from what he was going to say. But she knew beforehand what it was. “We shall pass near the church and we will rest there on our way to the Hall—then I shall take my sweetheart home my wife. Do you hear, Joan? Why are you looking away from me? Nelly will delay us else for a fine ceremony—and by-and-by we will go to the Mediterranean and spend our winter there. Does that content my love?”

“ Oh, Basil, how happy we shall be ! Anything will content me so that they let me stay with you ! ” There was a tone of her natural joyous *naïveté* in Joan’s response that made Basil laugh—as if she entered into the notion of circumventing Nelly, so kind and well-meaning, but so over-given to managing her friends.

“ We shall be very happy,” said Basil ; “ I shall forget the world and ambition.”

“ Only for so long as it is easy to lie dreaming. You will soon tire of that, I know. You look like coming to real life again to-day, dear ; you are better.”

“ A world better within the last five minutes—you have done me good, Joan ; you have done me nothing but good ever since I knew you. I thank God for you with all my heart and soul ! ”

She knelt by him and talked and let him talk—that was not forbidden now. Their love was sanctified by a suffering which had brought them to understand—if either ever doubted—the

littleness of life's pomps and vanities in comparison with its true affections ; and come weal, come woe, they were henceforward one for ever.

Thus talking, Colonel Godfrey surprised them, and Basil told him to what agreement they had come and asked his consent, which, indeed, he had taken for granted. The old man received the information with complacence, and even cordiality ; it was a sensible plan—the most sensible that could be devised under the circumstances, he said, and he was glad they had hit upon it. He made no allusion to the farm in Hampshire ; his memory was apparently short on some matters, and Basil was not the man to vex him with a needless reminder.

Joan was already more of a favourite with the Colonel than she knew. He had begun to imagine what Whinmore would be like with her fair presence in the long vacant rooms, and to believe that it would be a warmer, sunnier, pleasanter place than ever he remembered it. On his return from the lodge, he informed

Mrs. Beste of the early marriage that was to be, and when she, in her professional capacity, inquired which suite of apartments must be appropriated to the young Squire and his lady, he begged her to understand distinctly that the whole house was theirs, and that he would not have two families and two establishments under that ancient and hospitable roof. Basil had stood to him hitherto in the place of a son, and Basil and Basil's wife must stand to him henceforward in the place of son and daughter. There was no need for any formal arrangement or re-arrangement of quarters or service; they were to form one household with one interest and one head, himself that head: "For," concluded the old soldier, "I do not intend to pull off my shoes until I go to bed, and I am sure of my heir, that he will not covet to stand in them until I have done with them."

No. Colonel Godfrey was too liberal, too generous to earn that cruel impatience of his successor which happens to those men who

keep a hard grip on all they have till the last gasp, and then give it up with a grudge. Joan thought him so truly good and kind that she could not realize the bitterness of his prejudice against herself, and condemned her own injustice that she had ever felt aggrieved. Basil gaily explained the puzzle. "You have each fallen into captivity to the other's charms and virtues. I was under a conviction that so it would be whenever you met, and I took my stern kinsman's opposition easily—too easily Nelly says. But the event proves my tactics wiser than hers—I have won you and have not lost him or my good fortunes. In spite of this sharp lesson of adversity that I am learning now, it must be true what they said of me as a lad—that I was born under a lucky star."

"Who is the pagan now?" said Joan laughing. "You believing in your star, or I hanging my garlands from the window? O Basil, I can see you coming down the road by the Hurst again, and how like a god you

looked. I followed you with my eyes all the way you went."

"They call that falling in love, Joan. So you bewitched me, and I have never been free since."

"Nor ever shall, of my good will. I shall make May-garlands every year I live in memory of it!"

No inquiry had yet been made of Basil as to the way and manner of his calamity, but as his danger receded curiosity revived. One morning Colonel Godfrey asked him what he recollected of the circumstances, and Basil told him briefly that Turtell had sprung on him from behind, and had inflicted one wound before he could grapple with him; after the second stab he remembered nothing, but he thought they had a struggle between the two.

"Brigham was discreet," said the Colonel, lowering his voice. "When he found you, a letter from Miss Vyvian to Turtell was half thrust into your waistcoat-pocket, and he privately handed it to me. I kept it close; for

as I said—‘What is the good of dragging the poor General into our misery?’ She does not bid Turtell in so many words revenge her on you, but it would be a great stretch of charity to believe that the wish was not in her heart when she wrote to him.”

“Give her the benefit of the doubt—I would rather consider his act that of an irresponsible lunatic,” said Basil.

“*He* did not give her the benefit of the doubt; he understood her as I do, and his last crime, before putting an end to himself, was to try to do her service, and to make sure that she should know it.”

“He is dead then?” Basil inquired.

“He must have thrown himself into the river within an hour of his attempt on your life. He was not seen after, until his body was found on the Monday below Standen Bridge. She is an evil woman that—well if she be not the perdition of many more men before she dies! Would you care to see her letter?”

“No—send it to her, and tell her how and

where it was found. Perhaps that may wake her conscience."

"It bears traces of where it was found," said the Colonel.

The fatal letter was returned to Emmot as Basil wished, but instead of being stricken by shame and remorse she was only angry at its discovery. Nevertheless she revealed it to Elizabeth Seamer, and begged her to speak candidly and say whether it could justly be charged with the construction that had been put upon it. Elizabeth refused to answer her at first, but being pressed, she said it *had* borne it, and had borne the fruit of it too.

"Then," said Emmot, "you think me no better than a murderess?"

"I think," replied Elizabeth, "that the devil guided your pen when you wrote that letter. Perhaps you were not aware of him, for he is as much a deceiver as at the beginning."

"Elizabeth amongst the preachers! Hear, O, ye sinners, of whom I am chief!"

"Clapham is not the sphere for you, Emmot.

You have been threatening to go to Paris—I wish you would ! ”

“ I will—this decides me. Delightful, wicked Paris—it is the place for me ! ”

“ Go then, and, if you ever earned a blessing, may it follow you ! ”

“ What about the curses ? They are a big brood, I fancy. Well, I must take my chance with them—it was foretold me long ago, that I should never have any luck all the days of my life, and that I should die on a hard bed.”

“ You are doing your best to make it so.”

“ It is my fate—I don't care ! I wonder whether Rowland Wardlaw remembers me sometimes ? To think that of all the love lavished on me I have not a rag left, and that the only love I ever felt myself has turned to gall ! ”

Elizabeth did not believe in Emmot's sentimentality one whit. She uttered a derisive “ Pshaw ! ” and left her to soliloquize without an auditor. Nobody could tell, Emmot could

not tell herself, where truth and reality ended in her, and lies and false pretences began. Some people pitied her; when she was low, she profoundly pitied herself. She had inherited vicious inclinations, and she had not sought grace to master them. She went to Paris, and in that city of her adoption, they found a congenial soil, and ended by mastering her. Their rapid, rank growth soon secluded her entirely from the society of honourable women, and each step in degradation only increased her recklessness. Her further adventures cannot be written in detail in this chronicle.

A year or two of splendid infamy, and her career closed in sudden and deep eclipse. She had already become notorious for her rapacity, and the many promising young lives and fortunes she had ruined, when a victim of high family fell into her net. His natural guardians came to the rescue, armed with the terrors of the law; and Emmot Torre found herself one miserable day, to her overwhelming astonishment,

condemned to two years of imprisonment with hard labour, and a long period of police surveillance to follow, for a crime unknown to our penal code, but classed amongst felonies by our neighbours, and called "*détournement de mineur*."

General Vyvian used some efforts to obtain her release, but they were vain, and though he had never loved her as a daughter, he suffered keenly in her humiliation, and her base punishment. She would none of his help when set at liberty. She would not be delivered or redeemed, but turned again to her evil ways, on a lower level, until once more she brought herself within reach of the law. A longer term of detention was now assigned her, and an English gentleman, interested officially in prison discipline, visiting the *Salpêtrière* shortly afterwards, recognized the enchantress of Ashleigh in one of its coarsest and most shameless denizens. Inquiry was made there for her towards the expiration of her sentence, in the hope that it might still not be too late to reclaim her,

but the answer returned to the inquirer was, that she had been dead more than a year.

And thus Sythe Wardlaw's prophecy fulfilled itself.

LXIX.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

BASIL GODFREY and Joan Abbott were married as they had devised, and Basil's Caprice was adopted for life. It had not the air of a bridal procession, the procession in which they went to church, but they were as happy as if all the pomps and glories and congratulations of the world had gone with them. Basil chafed for a minute or two at sight of the ambulance in which it was proposed to convey him down the steep moorland path, and fancied he could go on foot very well to the bottom of the hill ; but Dr. Rigden, who had come from Standen specially to preside over his removal, laughed him into resignation with a firm assurance

that no choice could be allowed him—he must submit to be carried to the church-gate, or he must submit to stay where he was for some time longer. At hearing this Basil sighed a dolorous consent that they must do what they liked with him.

Mrs. Franklyn, who had arrived at Whinmore with her husband and Olive, did her little best to give the ceremonial dignity by decking Joan in the all-white raiment that Mrs. Paget had expedited from town, and by setting forth her pretty gipsy Olive as bridesmaid. But Joan, though she suffered herself to be clothed in the shining robes, would not wear the veil and crown. She put on instead a flowing cloak, and drew the snowy capeline, trimmed with swan's down, over her head—to look like the backwoods, and more comfortable to Basil, she said; to look her very loveliest, Nelly averred, for the capeline was infinitely becoming to her rosy, September morning face. She met Basil about half-way down the hill, carried by his bearers, and turned and walked beside him to the church: “Poor dear, quite forgetting herself and a bride's pretty airs

and graces, and taking care of him like a mother," said Nelly to her rector.

But, indeed, Basil looked as if being taken care of would still be necessary and good for him—much better than airs and graces, though there was no misunderstanding the perfect joy he felt in contemplating the fair lady of his love. Their journey was more painful and fatiguing than he expected, and his eyes had closed for faintness when they reached the church porch. But he revived soon, and stood upon his feet, and looked almost himself again, while they plighted their troth fervently in sight and hearing of a congregation that felt this was a marriage made in heaven, if ever marriage was.

They rested at the rectory for an hour or two after the ceremony, and in the cool of the afternoon—for the day was glorious from sunrise to sunset—Basil continued his progress to the Hall in the same fashion as he had come down from the lodge. The Colonel walked on before with Mrs. Franklyn, her husband and little Olive, and Joan only was left to bring him home. The way

lay first through the park under the sylvan shade of limes and beeches, and then by the garden, the terrace and Lady Cicely's doorway into his own sanctum. Joan started at the sudden view of their beautiful portraits on the wall, and glancing from the jocund countenance of her lover in the picture to the white, pain-wrung face of her husband, said impulsively: "Ah, my love, how glad I shall be when you are like that again!"

"Kiss me, sweetheart! I am thankful to be alive, even the wreck I am," replied he.

"O, my God, and am not I thankful too!" exclaimed Joan, with hands claspt and shining eyes lifted to heaven.

And this was their wedding day. Whinmore Church bells rang a peal, but there was no feasting, no noisy rejoicing in either cottage or hall. And for several weeks to come a gentle quietude prevailed through the old house. Nelly, the rector, and Olive returned to their home at Ashford, and Joan had her happy days alone with Basil, and evenings with him and the Colonel;

when she sang them the songs they liked best, and listened while they discoursed of the news of the world, and was a sweet, calm presence and consolation and delight in the longest hours to them both.

But by the dull November weather arrived, Basil began to find his time a little weary. He was well enough to be impatient of so much rest. He had entered on that stage of convalescence when he wanted a change from the daily stroll round the sheltered garden, and the drive across the soft turf of the park. Dr. Rigden had to remind him that over-much haste to be well might prove bad speed in the end, but it was easy enough to see that the physician's anxiety for his patient was practically over. When Joan put the question plainly, he gave them leave to go, and never in his knapsack-days had Basil packed up half so joyfully.

The Colonel set off first with his invaluable Gibbs, and the young couple followed at their leisure. Their first resting-place was Ashford rectory, their next, the house on Kensington

Mall. On the last evening of their stay there, Mr. Paget elected Joan to be his reader for an hour, and they had down from the study his most favourite old book, and a little table and lamp to themselves in a corner of the long drawing-room, so far from the others that they could read and talk their reading over without being heard by them. And the reading done, the blind curate spoke to Joan a little of herself and Basil and of the new life that she was setting out upon, and reminded her of perfect counsels, not of philosophers, but of inspired men who wrote as they were moved by the spirit of God, which counsels he entreated her to wear in her heart, and to prove in her conduct, and keep perpetually before her eyes, that they might guide her to the life everlasting. Then he gave her a copy of the Book they were written in, and keeping hold of her hand for a minute afterwards, said with a gentle regret: "I wish I could see your face, my dear; they tell me it is very beautiful. Well, beauty is God's gift, and not to be despised—and we shall none of us have

our eyes darkened in heaven. We have called you Basil Godfrey's Caprice till the other day—henceforward we shall call you after a word of his own to your godmother, Basil Godfrey's Blessing."

THE END.

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